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THIS ISSUE

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LX

MAY, 1909.

No. 2

THE TIME FOR ACTION.

By CASPER CARSON,

Author of "In the Lap of Luxury," "When Reuben Came to Town," etc.

What happened to call a halt in the career of
a spendthrift who was worthy of better things.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE CIPHER TELEGRAM.

"PIG, Penny, Pugilist, Poke." The station-agent at Shunton Hills, who was also telegraph operator, baggage-master, and general factotum, finished the transcription of the message, added the signature, and craned his neck out of the window.

"Hey, Harry," he called to his son and assistant, who was battling with a pile of trunks down at the far end of the platform, "where's Tad?"

"Gone swimming, I guess. Why?"

"Oh, there's a sort of gibberish message here for Daniel G. Ramsey. Who's he, I wonder?"

"Ramsey? Why, that must be the fellow who came in on the accommodation this afternoon with his family and all this baggage. They've taken the old Sampson place for the summer, and Billy Sampson told me he was a big New York banker. What's the message about?" leaving his task and coming forward.

"You can see for yourself." He held out the yellow sheet with a grin. "It's all right, though; I repeated it, and got back an O.K. from the other end."

Harry glanced at the cryptic words curiously. "Why, that's in cipher," he exclaimed, "and maybe about something mighty important. It ought to be delivered at once, dad."

"Maybe so; but how is it going to

be done, with Tad gone? Drat that boy; he's never around when he is wanted."

Harry hesitated a moment.

"Here," he cried, "let me have it. I can jump on my wheel, and ride over to Sampson's and back in less than no time. Besides, I am very strongly of the opinion that Ramsey would rather wait for his trunks than for this."

As he spoke, he snatched the fluttering telegram from his father's hand, crammed it into an envelope, and, leaping on a bicycle which stood against the end of the station, was pedaling away, a moment later, down the dusty country road.

The station-agent, shaking his head as though deprecating the waste of so much energy upon a mere supposition, returned slowly to his cushioned chair and resumed the nap interrupted by the clicking of his instrument.

He was not an imaginative nor an energetic man himself, this Benjamin Rock. Perhaps, if he had been endowed with so much of either quality as was possessed by his son Harry, he would not have been content to round out his days as agent at the little insignificant mountain station of Shunton Hills.

It was not entirely excess of vim, however, which had rendered young Rock so ready to undertake extra duty, nor, for that matter, the possible importance of the message, either.

To tell the truth, he had caught a fleeting glimpse of a smashingly pretty girl in the party which had alighted from the accommodation that afternoon—a dark, Spanish-like little beauty, with a ravishing smile and cheeks whose color was like the blush on a nectarine; and what young man of eighteen would not have been willing to drop his work and go chasing off on a mile and a half spin for the chance of a closer look at a divinity like that?

Fortune favored him, moreover, on his quest; for, as he turned in at the old Sampson place and wheeled smartly up the driveway leading to the house, he could see the midnight maiden on the veranda, engaged with one of her brothers in putting up a hammock.

They were having trouble with one of the hooks, and were both gazing rather ruefully at the result of their bungling efforts when Harry came up the steps.

He saw what was the difficulty in an instant.

"Here," he cried impulsively, "let me fix that for you."

And in almost less time than it takes to tell it, he had the trouble adjusted and the refractory hook hanging nicely.

"Oh, thank you," smiled the girl gratefully. "That was awfully clever of you."

Harry blushed as though he had been caught stealing sheep.

"You—you are Miss Ramsey?" he stammered.

She looked a trifle surprised.

"Yes; I am Anita Ramsey," she answered. "Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, ma'am—er—that is, no ma'am—I should say—"

He ceased to struggle longer with his embarrassment, and, for explanation, merely fished the telegram out of his pocket and extended it to her without a word.

"Oh," she said, glancing at the superscription, "this is not for me. This is for my father. Wait a minute, and I will call him."

A moment later the president of the New York Thirty-Fourth National came striding out on the porch, the open message in his hand and his face like a thundercloud.

Harry Rock had made no mistake, it

seemed, when he ventured the suggestion that "Pig, Penny, Pugilist, Poke," might veil a communication of considerable importance. As a matter of fact, it was nothing less than an intimation to the financier that a cabal of his enemies, taking advantage of his absence upon his summer vacation, were about to spring a well-planned *coup* to wrest from him the control of the powerful institution which he headed.

So fully were their designs perfected, indeed, that unless he were able to confront them on the morrow, and by some measure turn the tide, it was practically certain that he would be dethroned.

But Daniel G. Ramsey was a fighter, and, even as he hurried out upon the porch, a scheme was formulating in his mind whereby to circumvent the "gang."

"You are from the station, are you not?" he inquired brusquely of young Rock. "Tell me, what time does the next train leave for New York?"

"Eight forty-five to-morrow morning, sir."

"Eight forty-five to-morrow morning!" the other gasped. "Do you mean to tell me there are no more trains over this road this afternoon or to-night?"

"Oh, yes, sir—plenty of them; but they are express-trains. Only the accommodations stop at Shuntón Hills, two a day each way."

"But surely one of the expresses could be flagged?"

"I don't know about that, sir. You'd have to ask my father, the station-agent. I've never known of it being done before, though."

"Well, it's going to be done now," asserted Ramsey decisively. "What time does the next express go through?"

"The limited, at five-sixteen."

"Five-sixteen." The banker snapped open his watch. "Thunderation, I shall have to race to catch it!"

He started toward a buckboard, which, fortunately, was already hitched up and standing under a tree beside the drive.

"George," he called to his son, "run in the house and bring out my suit-case. Anita, you can come with me and drive the rig home."

And as Harry Rock wheeled more slowly back to the station, the buck-

board passed him in a cloud of dust, the horse in a lather of foam as its master vigorously laid on the whip.

"Gosh! it must be fun," commented the countryman enviously, "to get your blood all stirred up like that, because something has got to be done in a rush. Out here in this dead-and-alive old hole, it doesn't generally make much difference whether a thing is attended to now or week after next."

Yet, when he reached the station, and found the banker wrangling with his father, he could hardly have believed, in strict truth, that Ramsey was greatly enjoying himself.

The sweat stood out on the city man's brow, he was gesticulating fiercely, and the remarks in which he indulged were more forcible than polite.

Mr. Rock, however, remained placid and unmoved. He was one of those feather-pillow men upon whom it is almost impossible to make an impression, and to his slow brain the idea of flagging the limited was almost as scandalous a suggestion as to propose a revision of the ten commandments.

"No, sir," he asserted tranquilly, heedless alike of threats, expostulation, bribes, and entreaty; "it can't be done. Of course, I can wire in to headquarters for permission to stop her, if you say so; but I don't believe it would be granted, and, anyhow, there ain't hardly time to do it now. She'll be along here in twenty minutes."

Anita Ramsey did not, of course, know the exact nature of the trouble which confronted her father; but she could see, from his wrought-up and excited demeanor, that it was serious, and that he considered it almost a life and death matter to catch this train.

Consequently, when the bright-faced fellow who had so adroitly fixed her hammock joined their little group, she turned to him in eager appeal.

"Can't you do something?" she whispered, coaxing him with her dark eyes. "I know you can, if you only will."

He shook his head.

"I don't think so," regretfully. "You see, it's a pretty serious thing to hold the limited, and my father'd lose his job sure if— Or, stop a minute,"

a sudden idea coming to him under the inspiration of her glance. "By George, I'll stop her for you!" he exclaimed.

As he spoke he hurried off down the platform and, pausing only to snatch up an ax from the baggage-room, quickly disappeared along the track.

A minute or so later, there came sounds of lusty chopping from the direction in which he had gone; but the wrangling, disputatious men upon the platform paid no heed, and Anita could only listen and wonder.

Presently, however, there came a loud crackling, followed by a tremendous crash; and as Ramsey and the agent, startled by the noise, faced sharply about, Harry reappeared around the curve below the station, shouting and waving his arms.

"Hey, dad," he called, "I was chopping down that big dead tree along the right of way, that you told me to get rid of yesterday, and it fell square across the track. You'll have to flag the limited!"

CHAPTER II.

GETTING A START.

NEITHER the caustic remarks of his father nor the swearing of the delayed trainmen served to abate young Rock's satisfaction over the success of his exploit. Indeed, the harsh and bitter words flung in his direction slid off him like the proverbial water from a duck's back; for Mr. Ramsey, apprized by his daughter of the true reason for the accident, had laid a grateful hand upon his shoulder before boarding the halted train, and said:

"I've not time to talk to you now, my boy; but you can rest assured that I'll not forget your work this day, and when I get back from the city I shall take occasion to have a more extended chat with you."

Anita's eyes, too, with their beaming glances of admiration, gave him his reward; so that he worked away unconcernedly to help clear the line, indifferent to the black looks so freely showered upon him by the railroad people.

That night, after supper, however, when his father started in afresh with

the observation that Abe Dorsey, the conductor of the limited, 'had said, if it was his boy who had played such a trick, he'd fairly skin the young whelp alive, Harry began to wax impatient.

"Well," he rejoined defiantly, "I guess I'd sooner stand in with Mr. Ramsey than with old Abe Dorsey, even if he does act like he was lord of all creation in that blue suit and brass buttons of his."

The elder Rock glared at him with suddenly confirmed suspicions.

"So," he snorted, "you really did it on purpose, and to help out that stuck-up New Yorker who was pitching into your own father for all he was worth. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself, Harry."

"And now you think. I suppose, that he's going to make it up to you some way?" he went on jeeringly. "Well, you'll find yourself good and mistaken, if I know anything. That kind is mighty free with their promises and soft sawder, until they get what they want, and then, I've noticed, they're always too busy to see you."

But his sneering croak failed to silence the song of elation in Harry's heart, or to dispel the ambitious dreams aroused by the banker's parting words, and the sequel showed that young Rock's faith had not been misplaced.

When Ramsey returned from New York, his enemies routed, and his control of the Thirty-Fourth National reestablished more firmly than ever, he sought an early interview with the lad who had rendered him such signal service, and, learning during the course of the conversation that the country boy's chief yearning was for a wider horizon and a chance to make something of himself in the world, ended by offering him a position in the bank.

No small mark of Daniel Ramsey's appreciation was this, either, if the Shunton Hills folk had only known it; for there were many sons of rich men waiting and eager to accept even the most minor post in the Thirty-Fourth National, in order to learn financiering under the tutelage of its capable president.

Yet, so carefully were the qualifications and characters of the various applicants scrutinized that to land a job there

was in effect a certificate of exceptional merit and ability.

Nor, for that matter, was Shunton Hills at all disposed to stick its tongue in its cheek. Hitherto, it must be confessed, the community had rather regarded Harry as a "Smart Aleck," because of his readiness to criticize their slow-going village ways; but when it became noised abroad that he was "goin' to Noo York with that there rich banker what's took the old Sampson place," public sentiment showed a marked reversal, and there were not wanting those who averred they had always prophesied "somep'n good fer so spry a young feller."

Benjamin Rock, it is true, predicted disaster as he shuffled about in his run-down, old carpet slippers, and wondered fretfully why Harry couldn't be content to let well enough alone.

"Why, that boy is making eight dollars a month and his board," he grumbled to his wife, "and I was calculating to give him a dollar more next year if business picks up. You'd think he ought to be satisfied with that, wouldn't you, instead of chasing off to break himself down with the hard work they put on those fellows in the city banks? Besides, it's going to be pretty rough on me, for I declare I don't know where I can find a helper worth his salt among the worthless cubs around here, and the result will be I'll have to do the work myself."

"However," with a shrewd nod, "I guess it'll not be long before he comes sneaking back home again. He won't realize what a snap he's had until after he's left it for a while. The best way to deal with headstrong young colts like that is to give them their own way and let them run for a time. After a bit they're glad enough to settle down to a steady trot."

Harry, however, did not "come sneaking back home," except for an occasional brief visit, and neither did he break down under the strain of his new duties.

On the contrary, he "made good"; for, although he speedily discovered that a position in a city bank is far from being a sinecure, he was working in an atmosphere which suited him, intimate in a way with large transactions, and having his imagination stimulated and inspired

every day by the magnitude of the possibilities offered to ambition by the great metropolis.

Moreover, Mr. Ramsey did not lose sight of him, but, having taken a strong fancy to the quick-witted, energetic young fellow, watched over his progress, and advanced him as fast as conditions permitted.

He also not infrequently invited the lonely country lad to his house for a Sunday dinner, or on some similar occasion; for there was not a trace of snobishness in Ramsey's composition, and he believed thoroughly in the good, old-fashioned idea of an employer keeping in touch with his help.

And after one of these visits Harry Rock would return to his dingy little hall-room on the fourth floor back of a boarding-house, and, stretched out upon its narrow cot, would dream of the time when he, too, should be a rich and powerful banker, living in a palatial mansion filled with all sorts of beautiful things.

In these ambitious visions there was also another character always introduced—a sprightly lady who appeared to be the mistress of this home, and whose hair was dark, and her eyes sparkling, while the color in her cheeks was like the ripe blush on the side of a nectarine.

For, although he had seen many beautiful women since coming to New York, and had met some of them as he began to go about more in a social way, he had never once faltered in his opinion reached the first time he had ever seen her, that Anita Ramsey was the most beautiful, exquisite, fascinating, and wholly desirable creature who ever breathed the breath of life.

So he would go on building his airy castles in Spain, and installing her in them to do the honors, until—suddenly the alarm-clock would go rattling off beside his ear, and he would start awake to realize that a trial balance was waiting to be struck off down at the bank, and that as yet his income was hardly sufficient to maintain himself.

However, that state of affairs did not last long. With his successive promotions, each accompanied by a substantial raise in salary, Rock was presently able to live comfortably, to send something home to his mother, and even to lay aside

certain sums—small at first, but gradually increasing in size—as a nucleus for that fortune he intended some day possessing.

Under Mr. Ramsey's advice, too, he invested his savings, when they grew large enough—invested them so judiciously that by the time he was twenty-five and had become the paying-teller of the bank his personal account at the institution was one by no means to be sneezed at.

His habits remained economical, though, and he indulged in no splurging. His one idea was to become a master in the world of finance, and some day to win Anita Ramsey for his wife. Toward that goal he concentrated all his energies.

Anita, who was now twenty-three, had been abroad for the last two years, finishing up her education by a round of travel; but Harry could see no difference in her when she returned, except that she was, if anything, lovelier than ever. She greeted him with the old, frank friendliness, and seemed to be fully as interested in his plans and his career as ever; but he noticed that she spoke a good deal of a certain Mr. Arthur Corning, whom she had met on the other side, and who had paid her a good deal of attention on the score of having been at college with her brother George.

This Mr. Corning, he also learned, had inherited considerable money from his father, but, not content to live a life solely of leisure, was shortly coming to New York to engage in business, and had signified his intention of opening an office on Wall Street.

In due time, accordingly, he arrived, and was introduced to Rock at Miss Ramsey's one evening. The country boy—for, despite his long residence in the city, a good deal of hayseed still clung to the paying-teller's hair—thought him the most interesting man he had ever met, fluent, polished, magnetic, graceful, and was deeply flattered when, upon leaving the house, the newcomer hooked an arm within his elbow and took him for quite a long walk, ending up with a charming little supper at one of the swell restaurants.

But that painfully gathered bank account, if it had any prophetic instinct

whatever, must have shuddered and grown pale at the thought of that meeting.

CHAPTER III.

RIOTOUS LIVING.

AFTER that, whenever Harry Rock called at the Ramsey's he was almost certain to find young Corning ensconced in the drawing-room.

In some subtle way, too, he would be made conscious of the old adage that "two is company, and three a crowd," and presently, flushing with embarrassment, he would awkwardly withdraw to spend the remainder of the evening with Daniel G. in the library, or playing backgammon with sweet-faced, gentle Mrs. Ramsey in her private sitting-room.

Generally, though, when he would start to go out he would be hailed by Corning with the injunction to "wait a minute"; and after a while the other would join him at the front door, and they would go out for a season of fun and frolic about the big town.

Usually young George Ramsey would form one of the party, and perhaps two or three other "good fellows" would be added; so that, since Harry was unwilling to let Corning do all the spending without making some return, the expense footed up considerably, and he was a little worried at times to observe that his bank account did not grow as fast as formerly.

Nevertheless, he solaced himself with Corning's favorite phrase about all work and no play making Jack a dull boy, and although he made one or two spasmodic efforts at retrenchment, they were futile and short-lived.

He had got into the habit of seeking amusement at the places of gay resort, you see; and there is nothing so hard to break off as a habit, even though it be only as to which stocking one puts on first in the morning.

Nor was it only on the nights that he happened to meet Corning at Mr. Ramsey's that Harry now went out. In fact, he rather neglected the Ramseys a bit; for whenever the "crowd" gathered, there was always a proposal of some kind for the next evening, and Harry was get-

ting so he could not bear to miss any fun that was going.

Finally one night, when everybody had been wondering what could be keeping Corning away, that gentleman appeared late, but in a flush of high spirits, and rapturously announced that he was engaged to Anita Ramsey.

For a moment it almost seemed to Rock as though a bomb had been exploded under him. He saw all his cherished dreams and hopes, his youthful ambitions and his castles in the air go crashing down in one fell overthrow of destruction.

How blind, how imbecile, he had been not to realize before what was in the wind!

He pulled himself together somehow, however, and managed to extend his congratulations under the rest; but he excused himself very shortly afterward on the plea of having a headache—heartache would have been more truthful—and for three nights absented himself from the assemblages.

He could not blame any one, though, he told himself. No man could fail to be enslaved by the beauty and charm of Anita Ramsey; and it was certainly by no means wonderful that she should prefer a dashing, attractive suitor like Corning to such a dull and uncouth fellow as himself. Heaven be thanked, he muttered, that he had never let her know the silly hopes he entertained!

For three days, as has been said, he nursed his wounds in solitude; then, as he began to look at the matter in a more philosophical light, although the smart still endured, the force of habit reasserted itself, and he began to yearn for his customary evenings of excitement.

Accordingly, he went out and hunted up the "gang," with the result that very shortly he was back in the full swing of his frivolity, more madly and merrily than ever.

With this difference, however, that whereas before he had simply refrained from adding to his bank account, he now dipped deep into the hoarded store.

The object was gone, as it seemed to him, for which he had been saving and planning. Of what use, then, was the money except to give him a good time?

Yet, it must not be understood that

there was anything inherently wrong in this period of wild oats sowing on the part of Rock. He was a more than ordinarily clean-minded young fellow, and he rigidly frowned upon any suggested diversions which touched upon absolute evil.

No, at the worst, his dissipations were merely idle pleasure-seeking, and in another type of man might not have been considered even blameworthy; but it was because he was of finer metal and of greater capabilities than his roistering companions that his conduct must be judged reprehensible.

He attended to business as faithfully as ever; his handling of the bank's funds was as straight as a string; there was nothing in his behavior upon which his employers could justly have laid a finger of criticism. Yet he was spending more money than he earned; and that is always dangerous.

Yes, it certainly cost money to travel in Arthur Corning's crowd, and Rock made it fly as fast as any of them, although it must be confessed that even he failed to equal the lavish prodigality of Corning himself.

For, despite his engagement, the young Wall Street man continued as the leader, the life and soul of their little coterie. The prospect of his new responsibilities, instead of causing him to settle down, actually seemed to render him more wild and reckless than before.

This, too, notwithstanding the fact, as Rock had heard whispered about downtown, that his free expenditure, coupled with some crippling business losses he had sustained as a result of his inexperience at the Wall Street game, had seriously impaired his fortune.

Still, that did not make any especial difference, thought Harry; Anita undoubtedly had enough for two. And, in all probability, Corning consoled himself with the same reflection.

It was this suggestion, however, which first turned the bank-clerk a little against his brilliant friend. The sturdy country boy who had made his own way could not help feeling a certain contempt for a chap who, having wasted his own patrimony, would be content to sponge upon his wife for the remainder of his days.

There were other things, too, in Corning's deportment which of late had caused him somewhat to temper his former unqualified admiration. Nothing very tangible, it is true, consisting mostly in the adoption of a somewhat coarser and "sportier" habit of speech, and the occasional introduction into their circle of more or less questionable acquaintances; but, unimportant as these trifles were, they formed for Harry a "fly in the ointment pot," and the rift between the two men was gradually growing wider.

Matters stood about in this shape when young George Ramsey came bustling into Rock's rooms one evening just about dinner-time, his face all aquiver with excitement.

"Gee," he exclaimed, throwing himself into a chair, "but we have been having a royal old muss up at the house!"

Harry glanced up with unfeigned surprise. The idea of a "muss" at the well-ordered Ramsey home, where everything appeared to run upon oiled wheels, seemed almost a contradiction in terms.

"Yes, we have certainly been having a merry session," went on George, consenting to explain. "You see, the old man dropped on to Corning pretty hard some weeks ago, and put the question up to me as to just what sort of fellow he was.

"Well, of course, I stood up for Arthur, not only because he is a friend of mine, but also—" He hesitated. "Well, because he is negotiating some business matters for me which I don't particularly care to have the old man find out about—"

"You're a fool," broke in Harry severely. "What business have you got that your father shouldn't know. To my mind, you'd do a great deal better to consult him, and take his advice whenever you have any transactions on hand. I know it has been dollars and cents in my pocket to heed what he has to say."

"Oh, that's all right," rejoined George. "Another time I would probably go to him, but I am into this thing, and, as I say, I didn't especially want him to get next. Besides, you needn't preach," blustering up a bit. "I guess

you wouldn't care to let him know where you get all the money you blow so free, and you're not his son, either."

Rock was silenced.

"Well," he said less virtuously, "you defended Corning; and what then?"

"Oh, I staved matters off for a while; but to-day the old man came home all up in the air. He said that he had convinced himself that Corning was a worthless, idle spendthrift, and, worse than that, was not only an associate of some of the shadiest characters in the financial district, but was also himself engaged in various concerns which would not bear investigation. 'In short,' he said, 'Mr. Arthur Corning, so far as I can find out, is in a very fair way to land inside State's prison within a short time.'

"So, then, of course," George proceeded, "dad called Anita in and put her wise to what he had discovered, and she insisted that Arthur be sent for, and given an opportunity to answer the charges. He was game, all right, and he attempted to put up a terrible bluff when she first explained what was wanted of him; but the old man held the deadwood on him in the way of proof, and in the end he had to come off his perch and admit that about everything they said was true.

"Then he pleaded desperately for another chance, promised to reform, and went through all sorts of stunts; but it didn't touch Anita any more than if she had been a marble statue. She told him that for some time past she had felt that she had been mistaken in accepting him, and that her regard for him was less deep than she had thought; but that, in any event, she could not dream of marrying a man whom her father failed to approve or whom she herself could not respect. And with that, she handed him his ring and walked out of the room."

"So the engagement is broken?" demanded Harry excitedly.

"Of course: off for good and all. I know Sis, and when she takes a stand of that sort, she's just like the old man. An army of ten thousand men could not force her to budge a hairbreadth."

Harry's first feeling was one of distinct elation. The roseate dreams in

which he had formerly indulged, but which of late he had laid away, surged up strong and fresh in his heart again.

Anita was free! Free to be won by a man who could command her respect; and perhaps he had a chance!

He had to turn away his face from his companion to hide what was showing too plainly in his eyes; but, even as he did so, a sickening recollection came over him as to the state of his bank-account. He had consulted the ledger that morning, and had found but forty dollars to his credit.

How could he enter the lists when it would take him at least five years to save enough from his present salary to be in a position to propose? And how could he explain to her father what had become of the growing "nest-egg" which the latter had helped him to gather?

Oh, fool! fool! He had thrown away his chance to win Anita Ramsey through a round of silly extravagances!

CHAPTER IV.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND.

FOR a long time after George Ramsey left him, Harry remained alone in his room, moodily gazing at the carpet. He had an engagement for dinner that evening, but it entirely slipped his mind. Somehow, he did not care to eat.

Yet, scourge himself with bitter names as he would, and rack his brains until they fairly burst, he could hit upon no plan which offered any sort of solution to his problem.

Without enough to provide for her, he would be nothing less than a cur to attempt to gain any woman's love; and, even though Anita should be willing to overlook that and grant her consent, what could he say to her father when he asked for his?

Would he not have to confess to Daniel G. that he had been no less of an "idle, worthless spendthrift" than Arthur Corning?

In his desperation, his almost frenzied search for some way of escape out of the coil in which he found himself caught, he even got down his old bank-books, and laboriously added up each

item, hoping against hope that he might discover an error, or that in some way he could make the figures lie.

But it was, of course, a fruitless effort. The result showed the same depressing figures. His available cash assets were an even forty dollars—not a cent less and not a cent more.

At last, while he still ruminated dolefully over the situation, there came a knock on the door, and when Harry stepped over to open it, he was surprised to find upon the threshold no one less than the man who had played the part of his evil genius, Corning himself.

The latter was haggard and upset, his eyes hollow and his hands trembling slightly with nervousness; but he was evidently trying to maintain his usual debonair manner.

"Ah, Harry," he cried to the other jauntily, "this is better luck than I expected to find you in. Still, I had a little stroke of business which I wanted to talk to you about, so I thought I would take a chance and run over."

"Business?" repeated Harry, wondering what on earth the fellow could have in his mind.

"Yes," briskly. "To come to the point, I find myself unexpectedly hard pressed for ready money. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it; but, most annoyingly, it happens to be the truth. Of course, I could dispose of some of my securities at a sacrifice; but I hate to do that for the small sum I need. So I thought I would see if you would not be willing to loan me two thousand or twenty-five hundred for a few days."

Rock laughed hollowly.

"Twenty-five hundred!" he repeated. "You may believe me or not, as you choose, Corning, but I have been just running through my bank-book, and I find I have but little more than twenty-five dollars."

His tone and expression were such that Corning could not doubt the sincerity of the statement, and he, too, pulled a long face over such a disappointing check to his plans.

"By Jove," he exclaimed irritably, "that is certainly tough luck with a vengeance! And just when I have a chance for a 'killing' which would more than put me on my feet again!

"Isn't there some way you can raise the money for me, Rock?" he urged eagerly. "I'll tell you. You raise five thousand, and I'll put you on to a way of making a tidy bunch of money for yourself."

"How is that?" questioned Harry, not without a degree of interested curiosity.

"Why, you know Ed Spear, that Chicago fellow I introduced you to up on the roof-garden the other night. Well, he is interested in horse-racing—of course, merely as a sport, though, for he has slathers of money; and he has tipped it off to me that there is a horse going to run to-morrow which is sure to have a good price against it, yet which can't possibly lose. As he says, to put a bet down on this one is just like finding the money."

"Now, if you can only raise five thousand, we'll go in together on the scheme, twenty-five hundred apiece, and divide the profits share and share alike. There won't be less than fifteen thousand dollars in it for each of us. Spear says the odds are bound to be as high as six to one."

But, tempting as was the proposal, Harry shook his head. When the other had first suggested giving him a chance to make some money, he had thought reference was made to a legitimate business deal, and the idea had occurred to him that he might possibly obtain five thousand dollars from Mr. Ramsey. But it would have to be a sanguine person indeed who could imagine the president of the Thirty-Fourth National as lending assistance to, or even countenancing a racing speculation, no matter how sure the results promised.

"No," said Harry regretfully, "I couldn't raise five thousand dollars for any such purpose as that, if I had to be hung for it."

"Nonsense," scoffed Corning. "Do you mean to tell me that you couldn't borrow it from the bank if you'd a mind to?"

"Certainly I could. On good security. But where the mischief am I to get security for five thousand dollars? That is the question."

"Ah," a shifty gleam showing in his eye, "but I was thinking of your bor-

rowing it *without security*. Look at the thousands of dollars passing through your hands every day. What's to hinder you from holding out enough for our needs for a few hours? No one would ever know; for you could return it before the bank opened in the morning, and—"

He broke off abruptly. Harry's horrified expression warned him that it might not be safe to proceed, and he attempted to turn off the suggestion with a laugh.

"Of course, I was only joking about that," he said; "but, Lord, how I do wish we could raise that money. Here we have the chance of a lifetime; yet we are compelled to pass it up simply because we both happen to be temporarily strapped. Was there ever such beastly luck?"

He dropped his head into his hands, and sat as though in earnest thought, striving to ponder out some way of meeting the exigency, when suddenly he roused up, his eyes beaming.

"Why, to be sure!" he cried. "Strange that I never thought of it before. I can borrow the money from Spear. Will you agree to stand good for half the loan if I make the touch? It's a mere formality, of course, for we can hand him his five thousand as soon as the race is over."

Rock hesitated a moment; but finally nodded assent, and said he would. How he could ever pay back twenty-five hundred dollars to Spear, if the horse should happen to lose, he could not tell; but Corning had assured him positively that it must win, and then Spear himself, who was a practical horseman, must evidently think so, or he would not be willing to advance the money on mere personal security.

Yes, he decided, he would be a fool if he failed to embrace this opportunity so providentially offered. Why, at one stroke he would recoup all the money he had squandered, and be once more on Easy Street. On Easy Street, and free to woo Anita!

"All right, then," cried Corning. "I'll go right down and telephone Spear, and make sure he'll stand for it. He's up at the Dorfwald, I guess."

And, as he spoke, Corning was out

the door, and half-way down the stairs. Harry waited on pins and needles for his return. At one moment, he was scared to death lest Spear should grant the loan; the next, trembling with apprehension for fear he should refuse.

There was small need, however, for the anxious "Well?" with which he greeted Corning's reappearance; for the latter's jubilant face bore its own answer.

"Oh, it's all right," he said, resuming his seat. "I knew it would be. Ed Spear is one of the whitest boys that ever stood on two feet. He says we can have the five thousand and welcome, and pay him back after the race, or whenever we feel like it. But he says that in his opinion five thousand won't be more than car fare to any of us after that race is over."

"That certainly sounds as though he expected the horse to win, doesn't it?" murmured Harry.

"Win? Why, according to him, it's just the same as if there wasn't any other horse in the race. But I forgot to tell you. Spear says that he'll need all the ready cash he has with him for the big plunge he is going to take himself tomorrow; so, if he makes the loan to us, he will have to get cashed a Chicago draft, which he has with him, for six thousand dollars, and he was a little fearful that he might have some difficulty in getting the money."

"I told him, though, that he needn't worry his head about that; if he came down to the bank to-morrow morning, you would probably cash it for him all right. You will, won't you?"

"Why, ye—es, I guess so," faltered Rock, scratching his head.

Caution was whispering in his ear, and urging him to refuse; but stronger sounded the voice of a rash optimism, telling him to go in and win back his money and Anita.

"Yes," he decided. "Tell him to come around, and I'll cash his draft for him!"

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED TO A "SURE THING."

Rock took an afternoon off the following day, and accompanied Corning and

Spear down to Sheepshead Bay. Never could he have been content to stay in his grille-work cage and perform the monotonous round of his duties while a contest of such importance to him was being decided.

Nor could he wait to hear the news by ticker, or see it flashed out on the bulletin-boards. He must be where he could see the "gee-gees" go round with his own eyes, and know that his horse was a winner the moment it passed under the wire.

Before he left the bank, though, he duly cashed Spear's six-thousand-dollar draft, counting out the crisp notes and pushing them across the little glass counter as calmly and perfunctorily as though each one were not weighted with a load of anxious thought.

Then, when he had turned the business of his post over to an assistant, he hurriedly left the bank and slipped around to a little restaurant where it had been prearranged they all should meet.

He had been half fearful, in a nervous, uneasy way, that he should not find them there, for it must be confessed that his mind was not quite at peace in regard to that Chicago draft; but they were on hand all right, and, what is more, Corning thrust the five thousand dollars into his hand as soon as he appeared.

"But what is that for?" queried Harry. "Hadn't you better keep it to make the bet with?"

"Oh, I would rather that you placed it yourself, and then you will know it is all right," rejoined the other; and, for some strange reason, he waxed so insistent on this score that Rock finally yielded.

"I won't go into the betting-ring down at the track, though," he demurred. "It would be as much as my position is worth for me to be seen placing a wager of this size at such a place. If you insist on my putting the money down, Arthur, you'll have to tell me of some place in town where I can do it before I go."

"Oh, that's easily arranged," spoke up Spear, who hitherto had not been taking any part in the discussion. "There's a pool-room not two blocks above here where they'll take your bet all right. Just tell the man at the door that Ed Spear sent you, and he'll let you in without any trouble."

Yet, even with this assurance, Harry was a little surprised to discover how easy it was for him to pass within the guarded precincts. He had never visited a resort of the kind before, and from what he had read of the police having to batter their way in with axes and sledges, had supposed it to be very difficult to gain admission; yet the doorman merely nodded to him now and passed him in without a word.

He did not know, however, that arrangements had been made for his visit in advance, and that Spear and Corning had followed him to the corner below, so as to give a signal to the watching doorman and indicate that this was the man they meant.

"Now," observed Spear to his companion with a satisfied grin. "you see they can't ring us in on it if any trouble comes out of this affair. I'll simply say that the teller forged my name and took the money himself, and the facts will tend to bear me out."

Meanwhile, Rock, all unconscious of the crafty game set up on him, was mounting the winding stairs and pushing his way past the second guard into the pool-room.

The afternoon crowd of patrons had already started to assemble, and were sitting about the stuffy, tobacco-reeking place, exchanging reminiscences, or industriously poring over the "dope" underneath the flaring gas-jets.

They glanced up curiously at the stranger; and, as he had no desire to be recognized, this made him more than anxious to get away, especially as he was already far from favorably impressed with the surroundings.

Therefore, he hurried up to a man who seemed to be in some sort of authority, and asked if it would be possible for him to put down a bet on the fourth race at Sheepshead Bay.

"Sure," replied the functionary graciously, "just make out a slip with your initials and the name of the horse you want to bet on, and slide it along with your bundle into yonder window. We'll give you official closing odds on your pick, and if you win you can call around and get your money down-stairs in the saloon to-night."

Obedient to instructions, accordingly,

he prepared to make out the slip; but, as he started to write, he paused and bit at the head of his pencil, seized with a sudden qualm of doubt.

"By the way," he said to the man who had previously assisted him, "have you a list of the entries for to-day's races? I don't want to make a mistake in the name of my horse, you know."

"Sure, we've got a card. What race did you say it was you wanted; the fourth at the Bay? Well, here it is, all right."

Rock took the sheet of pasteboard handed him, and eagerly glanced at the printed names.

Ah, yes; he had made no mistake. Here it was right at the top of the list. Gold Heels; the name which Corning had so cautiously whispered to him over at the restaurant, fearful lest some one might overhear and plunge to the "good thing," with a consequent fall in odds.

"Gold Heels," Harry therefore printed upon the paper in unmistakable printed character, added his hastily scribbled initials, and pushed it, with the five thousand, through the little window.

Then, without regret, he started to leave the place; but, to his chagrin, he met at the top of the stairs a man whom he knew, one of the bank's heaviest depositors.

There was no use trying to avoid him, however, and accordingly he took the hand outstretched to him with the best grace he could.

"Ah, Mr. Rock," the fellow said, "glad to see you. This is the first time I've ever seen you in my little place, I believe. Well, even the best of us like to play the ponies once in a while."

His place! So he was the proprietor here, then!

A great wave of relief spread over Rock; for he saw that it would not be necessary to return here again and run the gantlet of those curious eyes in order to get his winnings.

"Yes, I have been making a bet," he said, "and, as I expect to win, I am wondering if it would be too much trouble for you to bring my profits over to the bank with you when you come in the morning?"

"Why, no; certainly not. Glad to do it. Let's see; what are you down on?"

"Gold Heels, in the fourth race at Sheepshead. My bet is five thousand." Then he hurried on down the stairs.

The proprietor gazed after him with a coldly speculative gleam in his eye.

"Five thousand dollars, eh?" he muttered thoughtfully. "I wonder does that mean he has been tapping the till?"

"No," he decided, "they don't start in on that the first time they come. More likely he's got a red-hot tip from somebody that knows. I guess I'll have to buy some of that Gold Heels stuff myself. He's rated as an old skate, it's true; but you never can tell when one of these dead ones will come to life."

Meanwhile, rejoicing in the completion of his errand, Rock was hastening on to rejoin his companions; and, having met them, no time was lost in proceeding to the track.

During the ride down on the train, and until the time came for his race to be called, he was flushed and excited, talking at random in order to conceal the secret misgivings which clutched at his heart, feverishly gay and boisterous.

The first three races of the day held small interest for him, since to his mind they only served to prolong the agony of his waiting; but he pretended to be vastly entertained by them, and stood about, trying to ape Spear's professional manner of discussing the performances.

It was anything to keep himself from thinking, to drown the still, small, chiding voice of his conscience, to prevent a breaking and giving way under the strain which rested on him.

And then at last his heart gave a great thrill and stood still; for the bugle had sounded, and the horses were coming out for the fourth race.

Mincing and prancing, the satin-skinned thoroughbreds, with their diminutive riders atop, paraded in front of the stands.

"There he is!" whispered Corning tensely, as he clutched at Rock's arm. "That's Gold Heels; the one with the boy up in the red-striped jacket. Look at the baby that's going to bring home the coonskins to you!"

Thereafter, Harry had eyes only for that one horse. Stiff in his seat, with his head bent forward and his hands clutching his chair until the knuckles

turned white, he glued his gaze upon the red-striped jacket, and kept it there.

During the fretful moments at the barrier, he suffered a thousand pangs and apprehensions.

What if his choice should be kicked and injured by one of those other curveting horses? What if he should be left at the post? Oh, what if a hundred things might happen?

But at last the webbing flew up, and, to the music of a thunderous roar from lawns and stands, they were "off"!

A moment's mixup at the turn, as the striving jockeys fought for position, and then the red-striped jacket flashed out in front.

"What did I tell you?" cried Spear, with swelling exultation. "Him all the way home! Why, he'll lead the rest of those dogs by all the distance from here to New York!"

But Harry was unable to articulate a word. He could only sit still and follow with fascinated gaze the swift, onward flight of horse and rider.

At the half; and the red-striped jacket was still in front, his mount galloping resolutely, steadily, as though he still had oceans of speed to spare.

The three-quarters; and still he was in the lead. True, the others were creeping up a bit; but Spear readily explained this by pointing out that the boy was gathering him up in preparation for the sprint home.

In the stretch, with the red-striped jacket still in front. The craning throng was already beginning to shout and gesticulate, and call the horse's name.

Suddenly there flashed out from behind a wiry little sorrel, who, with a burst of tremendous reserve speed, came on to contest the supremacy.

Already his nose was at the other's withers, at his shoulder, at his throat, creeping up veritably inch by inch.

True, the first horse was still in the lead, and the wire not a dozen strides away; but how many a turf-battle has been lost in that narrow margin!

For a moment longer they fought it out grimly, desperately. Then the little sorrel's nose pushed by the other's muzzle, and the boy in the red-striped jacket, seeing the fight was lost, ceased to ply his whip.

His mount faltered, lost his stride, and fell back into the ruck.

Harry Rock gazed at Corning with stony, almost incredulous, eyes. The "sure thing" was hopelessly beaten, and their five thousand dollars irrevocably lost!

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER LOSER BY THE TIP.

It is the hardest-hit fellow who makes the least fuss. A chap who yells blue-murder when he stubs his toe, will receive his death-blow with calm dignity.

So now, although two-dollar "pikers" were squealing and cursing all around him, Rock maintained a very fair semblance of equanimity.

True, his face was very pale, and he could not control a certain nervous twitching about the corners of his mouth; but his voice was steady, and he even managed to summon up a smile as he replied to Spear's voluble excuses and apologies for the failure of the tip.

"No one can blame you, Mr. Spear," he said quietly. "We all went into the affair with our eyes open, and should have known, even if we didn't seem to, that there is no sure thing in horse-racing. We have lost, and that is all there is to it, except to settle up. I owe you twenty-five hundred dollars, and, I regret to say, I cannot pay you at once; but if you will call around at my rooms to-night I will try to arrange some security for you, and fix it so that I can reduce the obligation by degrees.

"Oh, that's all right, Rock," returned the other, with magnificent indifference. "Don't you worry your head, old man, but pay me when you feel like it. Perhaps we can dig up a horse this week which will pull us all out more than even."

"Not for me," said Harry decidedly. "I am done, once and for all."

"So? Well, every one to his own liking. But I always feel as though I wanted to get my money back from the hole where I sank it.

"And that reminds me," rising from his chair, "that if I want to put a bet down on this next race I'll have to be getting into the ring."

"I guess I'll go along," announced Corning. "Won't you come, Harry? We can pike a little, and get that much fun out of it, anyway."

But Harry shook his head. He had made up his mind never again to be tempted to bet on a horse-race, no matter how small the wager; and when Harry Rock's mind was made up in that way it was made up for keeps.

He accompanied the others, though, from the stand down on to the lawn, and stood there while they went on into the betting-ring.

A couple of men strolling by just then stopped and gazed after the retreating figures of Corning and his companion.

"There goes that dirty tout of an Ed Spear," remarked one of them with a frown. "It's a wonder to me he hasn't been ruled off the grounds for all the crooked work he's done."

"It is, indeed," assented the other cordially. "Who's the new sucker he's got in tow now?"

"Oh, I guess you needn't waste any sympathy on that one. I see him down here with Spear a good deal lately, and I guess from all appearances he's pretty well tarred with the same brush."

Then they passed on, and Harry was left to digest the information thus fortuitously vouchsafed.

At first he was inclined to be angry, and told himself that the opprobrious term used was probably only a sneering way of speaking of a business enemy or turf rival.

"Why," he argued, "no one could have been more considerate than Spear was in regard to that two thousand five hundred dollars. The very fact that he told me to pay at my own convenience shows that he must be a man of wealth. No mere tout could afford to loan that much money in the first place, or to let it hang over, in the second."

But then it suddenly occurred to him where the money had come from with which Spear had been so generous.

If that Chicago draft should happen to be returned, the alleged horseman could not be held for a minute. He would simply be a thousand dollars to the good, and the bank would look to its official who had cashed such flimsy paper for the amount.

Whew! Harry began to look grave. The more he considered all the circumstances connected with the transaction the less he liked the appearance of it.

And suppose the draft did come back? What then? How was he going to raise six thousand dollars to take it up? He would lose his job sure.

More than that. If the bank ever dropped to the fact that he had got a part of the spoils he would be prosecuted and sent to prison. Oh, this was a lovely kettle of fish he had got himself into!

But he tried to tell himself all this was needless alarm and apprehension. The draft was probably all right.

Probably? Of course it was all right. This time next week he would be laughing over the idea that it had ever caused him a moment of anxiety.

Thus desperately and, it must be confessed, somewhat unsuccessfully trying to hearten himself up as he paced along the lawn, Harry all at once caught sight of young George Ramsey rushing wildly hither and thither through the crowd, his face white and his hair disheveled.

"Hey, George," he hailed, and the other, turning, saw him, and came quickly forward.

"Have you seen anything of Spear?" he demanded excitedly.

"Spear?" That name was fast becoming a nightmare. "Why, yes; he went into the betting-shed a little while ago with Arthur Corning."

"Well, he's not there now, and, what's more, I can't find him anywhere about the grounds. And I've got to find him, Harry. If I don't I am ruined!"

George's voice rose almost to a shriek as he finished; and, fairly beside himself, he was starting to chase off once more on his quest through the crowd. But Rock, reaching out, laid a hand on his shoulder, and turned him sharply about.

"Look here, George," he said sternly. "What's up between you and Spear? Have you been betting on their sure thing?"

"Yes. Or at least I thought I was betting, but it turns out now that I did not have down a cent."

"Well, in Heaven's name, what are you kicking about then? You ought to be thanking your lucky stars that your money was not burned up."

"Oh, but you don't understand. Spear is a scoundrel. He touted me"—Harry winced at the word—"he touted me against this horse so hard that I was wild to play it, but I didn't have any money. I had been losing pretty heavily down here with him before, you see. Then he and Corning got hold of me, and told me that although they were too short to lend me any money themselves, they could fix it with a bookmaker to hold me up for the bet, and not press his claim inside of six months, provided I could furnish him some good security. Well, I knew I could easily make up the amount in that length of time, so I gave them some railroad bonds which are as good as gold, and—"

"Railroad bonds?" broke in Rock, struck by a sudden suspicion. "Where did you get any such things?"

For he knew that at the pace they had all been going young Ramsey would long since have hypothecated any negotiable securities in his possession.

"Oh, I had them," evasively. "But what business is that of yours? You don't have to know all about my resources, do you?"

But Harry was not to be put off.

"Where did you get those bonds, George?" he insisted, gripping down hard upon the other's shoulder.

And although the boy tried to act haughty and indignant at first, he presently broke down under the continued pressing, and admitted that they were not his own.

"The old man gave them to Anita for a present once," he confessed sullenly. "Ten of them for a thousand dollars each; and she kept them in the back of her little jewel safe, never looking at them except twice a year, when she would get them out to cut off the coupons, and let the old man collect the interest for her.

"Well, when Spear and Corning got me all up in the air over this horse, and I was casting about every which way to lay my hands on some security, all of a sudden the thought of these bonds occurred to me. I knew that I could get them back all right, the semiannual interest having just been collected. Sis wouldn't dream of looking at them for another six months, and even though my

horse lost I would easily be able to redeem them in that time. So—so," he faltered, "I borrowed them without letting Anita know, and put an envelope full of blank paper in their place."

Rock did not attempt any moral strictures or reprehension at this time. The thing to do now was to get the mess straightened out as soon as possible.

Besides, he felt somehow as though the cloak of a preceptor would not fit altogether easily upon his shoulders.

"And has this bookmaker the bonds now?" he inquired quickly.

"The bookmaker? No," fairly wailed George, panic again seizing upon him. "That is what I have been trying to tell you. After the race I went to the bookmaker to have a talk with him, and make sure that the bonds would be held until I could redeem them, and he told me that no such collateral had ever been placed in his hands. 'Why,' he said, 'that crook of an Ed Spear has simply-soaked them down into his own wallet. If you're wise, young man, you'll lose no time in laying hands on him, and getting back your stuff; for I tell you straight, he's nothing better than a thief, and ten thousand is a pretty tidy haul.'"

Nothing better than a thief! The words rang upon Harry Rock's ears like the sound of a death-knell, and a chilling grip seemed to settle about his heart.

His misgivings in regard to that draft, then, had not been mere fanciful alarms. It would undoubtedly be returned from Chicago, and he was a ruined man.

In an instant he was as wrought up and agitated as George himself.

"Yes," he exclaimed distractedly, "you are right. We must get hold of Spear at once!"

CHAPTER VII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

HEEDLESS whom they jostled, and of the curious looks cast in their direction, the two young fellows, wild-eyed and with drawn faces, dashed hither and thither through the crowd:

Around the betting-ring they tore, disregarding repeated injunctions from the police to "keep to a walk," and thereby almost getting themselves arrested. They

paced over the stands and paddock, inquired at the stables, and even investigated the "field," where the cheaper "sports" are accustomed to congregate.

But nowhere did they catch a glimpse of the man who had "done" them, nor run across any tangible clue to his whereabouts.

Once, when they stopped to make excited inquiry of a waiter behind the pie-counter, the gentleman who had first aroused Harry's suspicions by referring to Spear as a "tout" happened to be standing close at hand, and the boys overheard him remark to his companion:

"Ah, a couple more of Spear's victims evidently; and they look as if they had been well stung, too. I hope they will catch the cur, and give him what he deserves; but they'll have to look sharp if they expect to do it. I heard last night that he had all his plans laid to slip away to Europe. It's getting a bit too hot for him on this side of the water, I fancy."

Harry wheeled about on his fellow-sufferer, struck by a sudden thought.

"George," he asked quickly, "were those bonds of yours readily negotiable?"

"Readily negotiable? Well, I should rather say so. They were payable to bearer. Anybody could have got the money on them."

Rock gasped. The possibilities were getting more interesting every minute. With a thousand dollars in currency in his pocket, and ten thousand dollars more in securities which were just as good as cash, there was evidently no reason why Spear should postpone for a single day his projected departure to foreign climes.

A thief does not usually delay long in his flitting when he has the swag safely in hand.

There was one point in their favor, however. The rascally tout did not know as yet, of course, that they had fallen wise to his duplicity.

He would argue that Harry, believing him to be a wealthy man, would not think of questioning the draft until after it had gone to Chicago and come back, a proceeding which would take several days, and that a still longer time must elapse before George became cognizant of the bold swindle practised upon him.

Hence, it was highly probable that un-

less his suspicions became aroused by some untoward event the scamp would, to a certain extent, take his own time in making his "get-away."

As these considerations presented themselves to Harry's mind he ceased his aimless rushing about, and dragging his companion into a secluded corner, urged him, too, to desist from the fruitless quest, and to try and regard the situation in a calmer and more judicial spirit.

"Look here, George," he said forcibly, "we are making a couple of confounded idiots of ourselves. It ought to be plain to any one by this time that neither Spear nor Corning is any longer on the grounds; yet we go chasing about like chickens with our heads cut off, not only to no purpose, but what is worse, attracting a lot of curious attention to ourselves, the one thing above all others we should most sedulously avoid. How long do you suppose it will be before some friend of Spear's drops on to the fact that we are looking for him, and hurries off to report. And, if that ever happens the fat will be in the fire and no mistake."

"But what else can we do?" objected George, feeling that any sort of action was preferable to an idle sitting down upon the stool of repentance.

"I must find him and get back my bonds," he repeated desperately for about the hundredth time. "You heard what that man said just now, Harry. Spear is liable to be off to Europe at any moment, and then what sort of a pickle would I be in?"

"And do you imagine that he will delay his sailing because he happens to hear that you are searching for him?" questioned Rock, with withering sarcasm. "Far from it, my young friend. That is just about the one thing which would lend an especial celerity to his movements."

"No. If we are going to overhaul this artful dodger, and succeed in making him disgorge, we have got to be wary and circumspect, not go hunting for him with a brass band and a drum-major at the head of it."

"Now, what I propose is that we immediately efface ourselves from here, and go quietly back to town to take up the pursuit afresh there."

"And how shall we set about it?"

queried George dubiously. "Report the affair to the police, and let them take up the trail?"

"No; I don't believe I would advise that just yet a while. Of course, it may be necessary to go to them in the end; but you know what a lot of notoriety it entails, and I for one am by no means convinced that if we play our cards right we cannot satisfactorily handle the business for ourselves."

They had passed out at the gate by this time, and with the crowd surging all about them, and the possibility of some of Spear's friends being at their very elbows, there was no chance for further conversation until they had boarded the train for New York.

Seated at last in a parlor-car *en route* to the city, however, and with their heads bent close together, Rock proceeded to elucidate his plans.

"In starting out to run down this crook," he said, "it seems to me that we ought as far as possible to put ourselves in his place, and try fairly to consider what we would do under like circumstances.

"Now, here is a chap with a lot of stolen booty in his pockets, and the natural inference would be, it is true, that he is going to get himself out of the way as speedily as possible. But, on the other hand, we must remember he does not think that his victims are aware of the fact they have been buncoed, or are likely to discover it until a considerable time shall elapse; you, for several months perhaps, and me—"

He caught himself sharply together with a frown; but George had noted the slip of the tongue, and exclaimed with eager curiosity:

"You! Do you mean to say that he got you, too?"

"Never mind about that now," impatiently. "If he did get me, it was for nothing like the amount for which he landed you, nor was it by any such openly criminal act.

"But, at any rate, as I was saying, he is apt to be fairly comfortable in his mind; and, feeling that there is no particular cause for haste, will arrange his departure to suit his own convenience, in the meantime making no change in his regular routine.

"Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, if I wanted to find him, I would simply visit one after another of his usual hang-outs until I finally ran across him; but, as the case stands now, that doesn't seem exactly advisable for two good reasons."

"What are they?"

"Well, in the first place, our ill-advised actions at the track may have put him on his guard, so that he is avoiding an appearance in public and hurriedly getting ready to fly."

"And the other reason?"

An expression of grim determination showed upon Rock's resolute countenance.

"Simply that when I do have it out with that gentleman I want to be where our interview shall run no danger of being interfered with by bystanders or the authorities. Neither your bonds nor my money can be got back by law without publicity and scandal; but I think"—significantly—"I can get them back—that is, your bonds to a certainty, and as much of my money as he has left."

"But how will you locate him?" asked George. "You don't know where he lives, do you? And, as you have already said, to go around asking questions would only serve to put him on his guard."

"True; so I am going to act on the old principle for hunting snakes. They always travel in pairs, you know; and if you can locate the haunt of one, the other is pretty sure to put in a speedy appearance also. Now, as you say, I don't know where Spear hangs up; but I am pretty well acquainted with Corning's apartments, and there is where I am going."

"Corning!" ejaculated the boy. "Oh, I say, Harry, you don't really believe that Arthur was in on the deal, do you?"

Rock's frankly contemplated laugh was not exactly pleasant to hear.

"Believe it?" he said. "Why, George Ramsey, if the angel Gabriel himself was to try and tell me that chap was on the square, I'd have to give him the lie.

"In on the deal?" he continued. "I'd be willing to make a good-sized wager that the two of them are sitting in some restaurant at this very second, jollifying over the complete way in

which they have trimmed us and ar-ranging for a division of the spoils?"

"And, as a consequence of this little celebration, I will be able to nail them," dropping once more into his explanatory tone. "You know how Corning is, always wants to return to his room after dinner to primp up a bit before starting out again. Or, even if he should be scared and ready to skip, it is certain he will want to go back there to get some of his things. And so it is ten to one, in any event, that Spear will return with him.

"That will be my opportunity; for while they are at dinner I propose to ensconce myself in the apartment and be on hand, ready to greet them when they arrive."

"But, of course, you want me to go with you?"

"No. I think, perhaps, I can handle the situation better alone. You go on quietly home and pretend to have a sick headache, so that the folks will not suspect that anything is wrong from that graveyard face of yours. I will drop up later to let you know the success of my mission."

"But, good Heavens, Harry, suppose they should get nasty on your hands? They would be two to your one."

"Not so. I also will be two—myself and a trusty little friend that I shall pick up at my lodgings and carry with me in my hip-pocket."

As he finished, the train whistled into Long Island City and the passengers started to rise to their feet. The time for action had come!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE EAVESDROPPER HEARD.

ROCK, with the other members of the "crowd," had often gathered at Corning's apartments for a jolly evening, or to discuss plans and arrangements for some impending frolic, and he consequently knew the place like a book.

It was a luxuriously fitted-up bachelor's "two and a bath" at the fashionable Martingale; and, as it was on the second floor, the tenant's visitors used the stairs or the elevator impartially in order to reach it.

In the present instance, Harry chose the stairs as the more inconspicuous mode of approach, and also in order that the elevator-boy might be able to return a truthful denial if Corning should ask whether anybody had called during his absence.

Thus he finally arrived without encountering any undue obstacles; and, so far as he could tell, unobserved at the door of the suite, discovering to his relieved elation that, owing to the warm weather, the transom overhead had been left open.

He had brought a twisted wire with him, and had fully intended to pick the lock if necessary, despite the danger of being caught at such questionable work; but the open transom made a way of ingress for him as though arranged on purpose and relieved him of the ticklish alternative.

Accordingly, after listening to satisfy himself that the cage was empty and the birds still away, he drew himself up to the aperture, wriggled through, and dropped lightly to the floor on the other side.

But once there, and after a glance around, he changed somewhat the plan of action he had formulated for himself.

The original purpose he had conceived was to hide in the bedroom until the two men had returned and were well inside the apartment, when he would suddenly disclose himself and enforce his demands at the point of the revolver.

Now, however, as the idea occurred to him that they might not both come at the same time, or, even if they did, might between themselves indulge in some talk which it would be wise for him to hear, a better suggestion offered itself, and he decided to delay such precipitate action.

A patent bed-couch, with a handsome cover on it, stood at one side of the front room; and, stooping down to examine it, Rock perceived that there was ample space under its light iron framework for a man to lie in comfort, while the overhanging mattress and coverlid would serve most effectually to conceal his presence from the view of any one in the room.

Down upon hands and knees Harry dropped, and, crawling into the retreat,

arranged himself as easily as possible to avoid the coming of the enemy.

But a long time passed before his irksome vigil came to an end.

Surely, that "jollification dinner" must consist of many courses; or was it perhaps that the tricksters were so exultant over their *coup* they had decided to make a night of it?

Then, again, anxious doubts and apprehensions would arise as to the possibility of their never returning. True, the apartment showed no evidences of any hurried flight on the part of its owner; yet that might simply mean that he had never come back there from the race-track; but, tipped off that the pursuit was on, had abandoned all his belongings to their fate and vamoosed.

Mingled with these queries, too, were anxious speculations as to what the outcome of the forthcoming encounter with the sharpers—provided they did put in an appearance—would be?

Would he be able to recover the Bonds? Would he get back any of the money advanced upon the draft, and, if so, how much?

Again, what action would the bank take upon his case should he fail to obtain any of the money? What would Daniel G. Ramsey think of him when all the facts came to light? And—most harassing question of all—what would Anita think?

Oh, Harry had plenty to occupy his mind, even though his period of suspense was long protracted.

But at last there came the sound of footsteps from the corridor outside, the click of a key in the lock, and Corning entered, accompanied, to Harry's intense satisfaction, by Spear.

Everything was turning out exactly as he had predicted to George, he told himself, not without a certain pride in his powers of deduction.

He was also pleased to discover that by lying close to the floor he could get with one eye a full view of the room from under the edge of the couch, thus enabling him to see as well as to hear.

So, with his one eye and both ears alert, and the revolver in his hand ready for action, he lay there quiet as a mouse and waited for what might happen.

From the very manner of the rascals

in entering the room, though, as well as from their subsequent words and actions, he perceived that there was no ground for his fear lest they should have been already alarmed. The idea of any immediate reprisals on the part of their plundered victims was evidently the last thought that came into their heads.

Indeed, both of them were in jubilant mood, laughing and jesting as might fellows who had dined well and were without a care in the world.

Corning hummed a gay little air as he moved about, turning on the lights and setting the room in order; while his companion, standing in front of the mantelpiece, thrust his hands down deep into his pockets and jingled his keys in thoroughly complacent fashion.

Of a sudden, though, he paused in his careless tintinnabulation and glanced quickly toward the other.

"I say, Arthur," he questioned, "you're sure there couldn't possibly be any mistake about the value of those bonds, eh? I'm not very familiar with junk of that sort, you know."

"Oh, no! As I told you, they're as good as gold. However, let me see them again and make sure."

Out of Spear's side coat-pocket came a bulky envelope, which he tossed over upon the table; and for a moment the hand of the unseen watcher tightened upon his revolver, and he was almost ready to burst from his concealment then and there. But he restrained himself with an effort and waited for further developments.

"Mistake?" smiled Corning, skimming with practised eye over the enclosed securities. "If I had a barrel or two of tidy little documents like these, I could make the Thirty-Fourth National look about the size of a tin savings-bank. Oh, no, Edward, never underestimate those beauties. They're worth every cent they call for, and then some."

Spear's heartfelt sigh of relief was almost laughable.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear it," he declared emphatically. "Things have been going so rotten bad with me and you lately in everything we've undertook, that I began to get afraid maybe those bonds were on the 'bumski,' too. But, since you say they're all right,

there's no reason why we shouldn't get 'em cashed to-morrow and sail on the Cavonia on Wednesday. Maybe things'll break better for us on the other side; and, anyway, the sooner we get blue water between us and this job, the better I'll be satisfied."

"Oh, what's the use of getting frightened?" rallied his partner. "There isn't one chance in a hundred that George Ramsey will drop to the game; and, even if there was, he don't dare kick up a row. He stole the bonds himself."

"No! Who from? How do you know?"

"He took them from his sister Anita. I know they are hers, because she told me about them herself," answered Corning. "Strange how things work around," he added musingly. "It must have been intended by Fate that these bonds should come to me in one way or another. Here, take them," thrusting the packet back into the envelope and holding it out.

"Oh, no; if you're going to market them to-morrow, you'd better keep them overnight. I don't suppose there's any danger of burglars in a place like this?"

"Hardly," smiled Corning. "The night watchman is always around and the help are exceptionally honest. As you say, too, I guess it would be best to keep them here."

And with that he stepped over to his desk, dropped the envelope in a drawer, and, carefully relocking the receptacle, resumed his seat.

Spear fidgeted about a second or two; then somewhat deprecatingly started afresh on his plea for an early departure.

"No matter how sure we are about George Ramsey," he urged, "I, nevertheless, think it will be good sense for us to take that Cavonia when she pulls out on Wednesday. Suppose Rock should get to thinking over matters and have the bank wire an inquiry out to Chicago about that draft?"

"Well, do you know what would happen?" replied Corning. "Mr. Rock would simply land behind the bars a few days earlier. As I have already explained to you, they can do nothing to you on account of that affair; but they can sock him, and you may rest assured they'll do it.

"In order to clinch the matter, I wrote an anonymous letter to the directors of the bank to-night, warning them of their paying-teller, and informing them that he had placed a five-thousand-dollar bet at Max Snook's pool-room this afternoon."

The tout stole a sidewise glance at his friend and scratched his head.

"Why are you so down on that poor sucker, Arthur?" he queried. "You and he have been pals, too, in a way, haven't you? Yet there is nothing too bad for you to hand out to him. What's the answer?"

"Oh, I despise the clodhopper!" broke out Corning, a dull flush of rage streaking his face. "So would you, too, if you'd had to have a lout like that held up to you as a model and a paragon!"

"Held up to you? By whom?"

The angry man hesitated a second.

"By Anita Ramsey," he burst out. "By Jove, Spear, that girl is in love with him—always has been in love with him. She doesn't know it herself maybe, but it didn't take me long to find it out after I got engaged to her. It was Harry this, and Harry that, until I grew so sick of hearing his name that I swore I'd fix her pink of perfection for her. And I guess," he added vindictively, "that I've about succeeded, although, at that," with a wry face, "I wouldn't bet ten cents that she didn't eventually marry him, jailbird or no jailbird."

"Well, since there's a woman between you, I don't wonder so much any more," granted Spear: "but before, I'm free to confess, I couldn't understand it, for he always struck me as a pretty nice young chap. Indeed, I haven't got any hard feelings against him now, except for the fact that we let him bet that five thousand dollars instead of holding on to it ourselves.

"Strange how I got such a fool notion into my head that that horse couldn't be beat," he muttered, shaking his head. "I thought we could make more by letting him win from the books first, and then taking his winnings away from him; but the durn combination didn't pan out.

"I went bad on that dope, just as I did afterward on Senator Boy in the fifth race, and to—"

Corning broke in upon him with a quick glance of interrogation. "Then you lost the extra thousand you got from Rock, too?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; every cent of it."

"And all we have is these bonds?"

"That's it. And that's why I say we ought to sail at once. There's no chance to do business here any more, so the sooner we get to the other side the better off we'll be."

A moment before the pulses of the man concealed under the couch had been thrilling and bounding with exultant happiness; for he had that surest proof in the world, the word of his rival and enemy, that the woman he loved, loved him.

But now the triumph and the joy turned to ashes in his mouth, and he saw standing before him the open door of a felon's cell.

There was no chance upon earth to recover the money paid out upon that worthless draft.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CATCHER CAUGHT.

IN his rage and desperation at the plight in which he found himself, seeing nothing ahead except ruin and disgrace, it is the greatest wonder in the world that Rock did not dash forth from his hiding-place and, with the loaded weapon in his hand, end the career of Arthur Corning then and there.

And, indeed, until his dying day that scurvy villain will never be closer to breathing his last. Three separate times Harry stiffened his muscles for the spring; three separate times his finger was curled tight about the trigger; three separate times his lips were framed to the shout which should announce his onset.

But, in the end, the tense limbs relaxed, the finger lifted from the trigger, the shout remained in his throat. He lay back, weak from the struggle, quivering in every fiber, the sweat standing out in great beads upon his brow.

But one impulse had restrained him—the thought of Anita. First, lest her name might become involved, owing to the admissions Corning had just made

to Spear. Second, because he had it in his power now, by relinquishing his vengeance, to save her dearly loved brother from the scandal of a tarnished name.

Only by his keeping still at the present time could the bonds be recovered without publicity and disgrace to George.

Accordingly, he lay back, clenching his teeth and gripping his hands to command his self-control, until at last, after some further desultory conversation, Corning proposed a visit to one of the roof-gardens, and, the other acquiescing, they took their hats and left.

Hardly had the door closed upon their departing figures before Harry was out from under the couch and across the floor to the desk, which stood beside a window.

A moment's examination of the lock by the light of a match, and then setting deftly to work with his pocket-knife and piece of twisted wire, he soon had the receptacle open.

Nor had he to rummage long for what he sought. He had watched Corning carefully when the latter put the bonds away, so now his hand closed almost instantly upon the precious envelope.

Nothing now remained but to get away. His task was done.

But first he must make sure that there was no mistake; so he lighted another match, and held it as he hurriedly ran over the contents of the package.

Yes, this was what he wanted, beyond question. Ten railroad bonds of the value of one thousand dollars each, all in the envelope, and all in good condition. And now, at last, he could go.

But just at that moment a window flashed up on the other side of the court, across from Corning's apartment, and a shrill, feminine voice fairly split the air with shrieks of "Burglars! Burglars!"

Startled and dismayed, for he realized that it must be to him attention was being directed, Rock wavered an instant, uncertain just what to do. Then it came to him that to remain there in the room, beside the rifled desk, would be fatal.

Even though he was known as a friend of Corning, he would necessarily find a situation of that sort difficult to explain. No; he must try to get away, whatever the hazard.

Swiftly he flew to the door and tried the knob, hoping that Corning might possibly have failed to turn the key on the outside. But the hope was vain. The door held, and there was no time to pick the lock; for the entire house was in a turmoil now, the screams of women and children resounding from every floor.

It was plain, therefore, that he must go as he had come; and that he had better lose no time about it, either. With a quick spring, he drew himself up to the transom opening, climbed through, and was just about to drop into the corridor when there came a howl of triumph from up the hallway, and two lusty porters, charging forward, bore him to the ground underneath their combined weight.

Harry was not greatly injured by the fall, for he was lithe and wiry, and able to stand a good deal of rough handling; but it seemed to him as though he should be crushed into a pancake before he could persuade the two men to remove themselves from off his chest.

He was sadly out of wind when he was at length dragged to his feet; but he made a fair stagger at a smile of quizzical amusement.

"I guess I have been the cause of considerable trouble here," he said, "and I can hardly blame you fellows for taking me for a burglar; but you understand, of course, that I am a friend of Mr. Corning's, and that when he locked me in his room for a lark, the only way I could get out was through the transom. It's all a joke, boys; just a big joke."

They were plainly skeptical.

"Aw, come off!" growled one of them. "You'll have to dig up a better one than that. Hold him there, Bill, until I get the pass-key, and see whether there mayn't be another of 'em still inside the room."

Now, what Harry was more anxious to avoid than anything else was to have the condition of the desk discovered, and he therefore insisted so vehemently that the affair was all a joke, and that he could prove a clean bill of health, if they would send for Mr. Keer, the proprietor of the hotel, who knew him, that the men, aided thereto by sugges-

tions from the crowd of guests and waiters who had gathered by this time, finally yielded so far, and a messenger was accordingly despatched for Mr. Keer, who was at the home of a friend, a block or two away.

Presently, word came back that the proprietor was engaged in a hand of "bridge" at the moment, but would be over as soon as the rubber was played out.

While they were all waiting, however, the regular policeman on the block, having heard of the disturbance, came nosing about, and stood regarding Rock with a severe and cynical disfavor.

Suddenly a gleam of quick suspicion showed in his eye, and, with a movement as quick as a cat's, he twitched out of the prisoner's pocket that significant strand of twisted wire.

"A joke, is ut?" he observed with lofty disdain. "Begorra, there's a la-ad down in Part Fo-our iv th' Criminal Co-oorts that I'm thinkin' c'd take th' measure iv this joker in iligant style. 'Tin years f'r yours,' is his fav'rite bit iv pleasanthy."

This circumstance naturally turned the sentiment of the bystanders against the prisoner, but he still asserted so vigorously his claim that it was a joke, and showed such evident willingness to face Mr. Keer, that final decision was withheld in most minds until the proprietor should appear and pass his verdict.

And then there came a quick murmur along the corridor, at which Harry hopefully raised his glance, expecting to behold the landlord's familiar visage; but, instead, around the corner came—Corning!

If the earth had opened beneath him in a cataclysmal gulf, Rock could not have been more dismayed. For he realized, as did every one else in the company, that there was no longer any reason to wait for the word of the proprietor. The tenant of the apartment was here.

And Corning, too, went aghast, it was plain, when he first recognized the identity of the prisoner. His face grew white, and he had to take a quick step to preserve his balance; for his guilty heart failed him as he saw at once that

his crime was known, and the pursuit begun.

Then, with a better comprehension of the situation, a malignant light kindled in his eye, and he raised his hand to hide the smile of triumph which flickered across his lips.

"Yes, certainly I know this man," he replied to the questions addressed to him; "but it is equally certain that I do not know what he was doing in my room."

As he spoke, he turned the key in the lock, and, as he switched on the light, turned instinctively toward the desk. With a sharp exclamation, he sprang forward and thrust his hand into the rifled compartment.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "I have been robbed of ten thousand dollars in bonds!"

The policeman stepped quickly back to Rock and, reaching into his inside coat-pocket, held up the envelope.

"Is these thim?" he asked.

"Then come wid me, my gay joker," clapping down a hand of authority on his prisoner's shoulder. "Th' capt'n be wantin' to see yez down at th' station-house!"

CHAPTER X.

HELD FOR EVIDENCE.

HARRY realized the futility of attempting any defense at that stage of the proceedings, and therefore accompanied his captor quietly and with the best grace he could muster over to the police station.

Arrived there, however, he immediately asked for an interview with the captain, and made a clean breast of the whole affair, at least so far as the bonds were concerned. His own trouble on account of the draft, he somewhat dolefully reflected, would become known soon enough.

The captain was naturally a bit incredulous of the story recited to him; but, being favorably impressed with the seeming frankness of the young prisoner, finally consented that George Ramsey should be telephoned to come down.

The distressing information came back, however, that Mr. Ramsey was quite ill with a severe sick headache and

could not be disturbed on any account. Would not his presence on the morrow serve as well?

"Every bit as well, as far as I am concerned," commented the captain; "but it's a shade rough on you, if you're innocent, Mr. Rock, for under the circumstances I shall of course have to lock you up."

"Oh, that's all right," rejoined Harry, thinking involuntarily that within a very short time the experience might become a by no means novel one to him. "The chief point of interest with me is to know that the bonds are safe, and you will take good care of them?"

"Oh, yes; they will be as secure here as they would in your vault over at the Thirty-Fourth National."

Corning, who had been sitting across the room, pretending to be serenely contemptuous of Rock's charges against him, jumped up as though he were shot.

"Secure here?" he gasped. "Do you mean to tell me that I cannot have my property, now that the thief is under arrest?"

"Certainly not. Those bonds will have to be held as evidence until the case is finally adjudicated."

"Oh, but I say," in agitated protest, "that will never do. Why, I need those bonds to put through an important business deal to-morrow; absolutely *must* have them."

"Can't help that, Mr. Corning. You've had this man arrested on the evidence of those bonds being in his possession, and now they will have to remain with us until the court decides to whom they do belong."

"But I will withdraw the charge," cried Corning eagerly. "I will decline to prosecute."

All his debonair assumption was gone now. His face was gray, and his hands trembled as he knotted his fingers together. If he could not secure the bonds and market them, he saw where a swift retribution waited for him.

"Yes, I withdraw the charge," he repeated almost hysterically.

"Then," said the captain, a glint of a teasing twinkle in his eye, "you admit that the bonds belong to Mr. Rock, eh, their having been in his possession being *prima facie* proof of his ownership?"

"Belong to him?" howled the distracted wretch. "No, no, no! They are mine. I will withdraw the charge, I tell you; but only on condition that the bonds are returned to me at once."

"And rather than consent to that," broke in Rock, "I would spend every night in a cell for the next ten years!"

The police captain, who had been studying the faces and actions of both young men and considering within himself, suddenly reached a decision to send for George Ramsey again, but this time more preemptorily and upon his own hook.

"There is more in this case than appears on the surface," he muttered into the depths of his heavy mustache, "and I guess it's about up to me to learn what has been going on."

He made no mention of his purpose to either of the young men, however, but, having secretly despatched the message, watched with amusement the game which was on between them.

Corning, ghastly now between apprehension and anxiety, was trying by every means in his power to induce Rock to give up the bonds, and let the charge of burglary be dropped; but Harry was sturdily resisting all his persuasions.

At last, after a manifest inward struggle, the sharper came to a desperate resolution. Pretending to want a drink of water, he crossed the floor, and as he passed the other's chair he muttered in a rapid undertone:

"That draft you cashed for Spear is bogus, and will cost you your job. If you let me keep four of the bonds, you can have the other six, and so be able to square the thing up. Is it a bargain?"

Like a flash, Rock was upon his feet; and all the nervous strain, the pent-up passion, and the restrained feeling of that eventful day went into the blow which he sent smashing squarely into Corning's face.

"Take that, you thieving hound, you crawling, treacherous beast, for an answer to your dirty bribe!"

The recipient of the blow went to the floor, dazed and with his cherished beauty pretty effectually spoiled for the time being; but as the police captain sprang forward to interfere, Harry

turned on his heel and resumed his seat as though too utterly contemptuous of such vermin to pay any further attention to him.

At that moment there came a rap on the door, and the captain interrupted the rather caustic homily he was energetically delivering to both combatants in order to open it.

"That must be George Ramsey," he muttered to himself; but it wasn't.

It was, to his surprise, a very stylishly and becomingly attired young woman, who, her face suddenly suffused with color, rushed up to Harry Rock and took both his hands in hers.

Then she turned to the captain.

"I am Anita Ramsey," she explained, "and when your message came, stating that Mr. Rock was in some sort of trouble down here, my brother was asleep, and as my father is in Philadelphia, there was no one to come but myself. If I can be of use in any way, pray command me, for any member of our family would esteem it only too great a privilege to be of assistance to Mr. Rock."

"I'm afraid you can't be of any help, though, ma'am," replied the captain disappointedly. "What I wanted to ask your brother about, you see," oblivious to the signals Harry was making to him, "was in regard to some bonds which Mr. Rock insists belong to your brother, but which this Mr. Corning also claims as his."

"Bonds?" she repeated with a puzzled air. "I didn't know that George had any bonds."

"These are ten railroad bonds of the value of one thousand dollars each," went on the captain, with the hope of refreshing her memory. "See, here they are. Perhaps you may remember your brother's having had them?"

He lifted the envelope from his desk and held it up for her inspection.

"Why—why—" she gasped. "Those bonds are mine! My very own, that father gave me for a present when—"

But the police captain's attention was caught by a figure which, rising from the floor, had started to steal furtively through the door.

"Hey," he called to his subordinates in the other room, "don't let that man get

away! Hold him, some of you, out there! It is beginning to look as though I shall want him."

CHAPTER XI.

OH, WHAT A DIFFERENCE IN THE MORNING!

THERE was, of course, nothing else for Rock but to give Anita the straight story of the bonds from beginning to end, and although he spared George all that he possibly could in his recital, it did not take her long to perceive that her brother had been saved solely through his friend's courage and readiness of resource.

"Oh, Harry," she cried, "it seems to me as though you were always coming to the rescue of some member of our family! I wonder if there was ever before any one so dependable and absolutely square as you?"

He felt like a whipped cur; for all the time she was praising him, the thought of that Chicago draft kept rising to his mind to spoil his pleasure in her commendation.

Neither did he tell her of the scrape he was in; for he knew that she would immediately offer to help him out from her own resources, and he did not think he could quite bear that.

As to going his bail at the police station, that was a mere formality, and he interposed no objection when she insisted on doing it; but when it came to accepting a substantial obligation at her hands to rid him of a load resulting from his own follies—why, he told himself, he would rather starve and die in the gutter!

Yet it was a sore temptation to confide in her, if only for the happiness of having a secret between them and to receive her sympathy and pardon. He longed to lay his poor, bruised heart at her feet, and then if she granted him absolution, he did not care what might happen to him.

But he dared not speak, and have her offer monetary aid to him, only to despise him ever after.

So, as he took her home, she noticed that he was not the frank, open comrade he had always been to her, and she wondered grievously what could have changed him.

He made her promise, though, before he left, that she would not speak of George's shortcomings to her father upon the latter's return, and as she agreed to this a passionate tremble crept into his voice which made her glance down quickly and wonder if his previous restraint had been only shyness, and if he was about to speak the words her heart confessed she was ready to hear.

But he said no more; merely pressed her hand, and without a word went quickly away, leaving her still wondering.

She did not understand the reason of the tremble in his voice, nor why he had exacted the promise. The latter was because he had made up his mind to confess all the circumstances of his own scrape to old Daniel G. upon the morrow, and he did not wish to appear in the light of trading for mercy upon the favor he had been able to render the son.

The tremble in his voice was due to a sudden realization that after his story was told he would have to resign definitely and forever the dream he had held so long. Old Daniel G. might permit him to retain his position in the bank, but receive him as a husband for his daughter—never!

Still he held manfully to his resolution; for he knew it was the only square and honest thing to do. But, oh—as he said to himself that night while he tossed upon a sleepless couch, trying to conjure up some way of avoiding the unpleasant necessity—but, oh, he would rather have every tooth in his head pulled out slowly, one by one! Daniel G.'s scorn was not a pleasant thing to face.

Yet, rack his brain as he would—and he had done little but this ever since the problem had risen to confront him—no other suggestion seemed to offer itself. He must tell the stupid, silly story over to that stern, grizzled old man, and take the consequences, whatever they might be.

Slowly and haltingly he wended his way to the bank, like a boy on the way to school expectant of a whipping. He showed small zest for the preliminary duties of the day, but kept casting frequent glances toward the door of the little office marked "President," as though equally apprehensive that its occupants might or might not appear. One other thing he did, too. He hunted

up the mail-clerk and destroyed the scurrilous anonymous letter which Corning had posted the night before. The truth was bad enough, without having a lot of lies tacked to it.

And that truth—bad enough as it was—he had to tell to Daniel G. Ramsey! How the cloud of that coming confession hung over him! It seemed to change the morning, which was clear and beautiful outside, into a murky, lowering day with overcast skies and damp, chilling winds.

The hour of his ordeal was postponed, however, for the president happened to be late, and, with the opening of the bank to the public, Rock had to enter his cage, to stay there until relieved.

Somewhat fretful of the delay, Harry regarded it as almost a personal affront on the part of Fate that the first customer to appear should be the pool-room man whose place he had visited the day before.

As though to mock him, too, the fellow pulled out a roll of bills large enough to choke a horse, and began peeling off five hundreds and thousands as though he never would stop.

Finally he wadded the money up into a bunch and pushed it through the window.

"There you are," he said.

Harry supposed he had simply made a mistake, and nodded his head in the direction of the receiving-teller.

"Wrong window," he admonished shortly.

"No, no," persisted the man. "That's yours."

"Mine?" staring blankly.

"Certainly. What you won on Gold Heels yesterday. Five thousand dollars at official odds of six to one, or thirty thousand as your profit. Count it, and see if there isn't thirty-five thousand in the bundle?"

Harry wondered if he was dreaming, or the man insane.

"But Gold Heels didn't win," he faltered. "He led all the way to the finish, but was beaten out by a little sorrel who came from behind."

"Oh, that was Gold Hills," said the man impatiently.

Then he stopped abruptly, and now it was his turn to stare.

"Do you mean to tell me that you

intended to bet on Gold Hills," he asked in awestruck tones, "and got your money down on Gold Heels instead? Man, man," dazedly shaking his head, "you ought to quit this job and go into a museum as the greatest specimen of luck unhung."

"Still, I oughtn't to kick," he added cheerfully, "for I followed your lead, and drew in a nice little wad myself. I'm just on my way to the next window now to give it to you chaps to take care of. Well, so long. Come over and see me soon again."

Harry threw up his hands.

"Not on your life!" he rejoined gaily. "Lightning never strikes but once in the same place, and I've been hit."

Then, without delay, he wired six thousand dollars to Chicago to meet the bogus draft when it should arrive, and deposited the balance to the credit of his almost moribund bank account.

Strange how all the world now took on a different aspect! The sky was blue and the sun shining, and even the grumpy old bookkeeper, whom he disliked, appeared to him as a long-lost brother.

Yet, one thing remained unaltered. He felt that he must still tell Daniel G.—not only because the bank had a right to know of the transaction concerning the draft, but also for his own sake, in order that the memory of the dressing-down he was going to receive might serve as a deterrent to any such escapades in the future.

And tell he did, falteringly, shamefacedly, but holding nothing back and concealing not one thing.

Daniel G. listened to the end in silence. Then he observed dryly:

"And so you borrowed six thousand dollars of the bank's money, and by your good judgment made thirty thousand dollars in one afternoon. That looks like good business to me. Let's go into it together."

"Not for me," and Harry spoke emphatically. "I wouldn't go through what I have suffered in the past twenty-four hours again for thirty thousand times thirty thousand dollars. And as for good judgment, I have already told you that my winning was a sheer fluke, the bull-headedest sort of bull-headed luck. No, sir. I have made up my

mind. I will never lay a wager on another horse-race. So far as I am concerned, hereafter the horse will 'run for Sweeny,' as they say at the track."

The severe but kindly old banker gave one of his rare smiles.

"Right, my boy," he said, "and I believe you. You have had a hard lesson; but I think you will be an all the better man on account of it. You have told me very little concerning your squandering of money and your idle habits which I did not already know, for I have kept closer tab on you than you have perhaps thought.

"But I have always trusted that you would see whither you were heading some day, and would then pull up short. And I believe that time has now come to you, Harry.

"You have shown it by coming to me for this interview this morning. You showed it by the noble way in which you stood by George in that affair of his—"

"George?"

"Yes," smiling a little sadly. "You have not been the only one to make confession to me this morning. The boy had been weak, even criminal; but I am glad to say he behaved like a man in the end, and told me everything of his own accord. You will know some day how

THE END.

deeply I appreciate the share you took in the transaction."

"I only wish I could have done more," said Harry modestly. "I am afraid, as it turned out, there can be no escape from some notoriety."

"Oh, yes, there can," returned the old man. "That has already been arranged, and Corning and Spear will be prosecuted not for the affair of the bonds, but for some very shady business deals in which they have been engaged, and of which I was already cognizant. I am told that both of them are almost certain to receive long terms in Sing Sing."

He paused, and Rock, taking this as a signal for him to go, started toward the door; but the old man called him back.

"Am I mistaken, Harry," he asked a bit constrainedly, "that you have always cared a good deal more for Anita than you showed upon the surface?"

Harry, taken utterly by surprise, raised a pair of quick, startled eyes to meet the old man's gaze, bent searchingly upon him.

Their glances interchanged, and, although not a word was spoken, both understood what was in the other's mind.

"She is free, Harry," said Daniel G. softly at last. "Why don't you go in and win?"

THAT STICK AND SINGLETON.

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE.

An early morning sally after thieves, and the singular fashion in which the belated member of the posse gave an account of himself.

ONE after another the brightly lighted windows of the big Thorley house winked out until it was only a huge black shadow in the moonlight.

A house party of some magnitude was in progress, and there had been dancing in the evening; but the guests, tired after a day of golf, tennis, and rowing, had retired early, and by one o'clock not even a servant was about, and perfect quiet reigned. The moon cast a pale blue light over the lawn, throwing the cordons of rare evergreens and exotic shrubs into all sorts of fantastic figures;

but not a sound was to be heard, not even when three creeping figures parted the branches of a clump of conifers and hastened stealthily across the grass. A wakeful sparrow chirped protestingly at having his rest broken, but the three intruders made no sound.

They crept into the dark shadows of the veranda, and immediately concentrated their attention upon a window leading into the hall. That they could not have been adepts may be gathered from the fact that, after they had labored over the work of the glazier and lock-

smith for some moments, a sleep-destroying burglar-alarm went off like the tocsin of an army, and in another instant the whole house was lighted as for a festival.

The three novices were good runners, and made off across the grounds without minding garden-paths or new flower-beds; and it is probable that no harm might have been done, beyond breaking the rest of a sparrow and ruining a good pane of glass, had not a young groom, returning home from a night off in the town, heard the alarm-bell in the house of his master and thrown himself courageously in the path of the fugitives.

He was a brawny lad, well able to give an account of himself, and he gave the tallest of the three a sharp tussle for a moment; but one of the ruffian's comrades came to his rescue, and quickly rendered the poor groom *hors de combat* by hammering his head vigorously with a heavy jimmy.

When Mr. Thorley ran out with a number of his male guests, the interlopers were far away, and the groom lay there, his face turned up to the moon, with a fractured skull. A motor-car was quickly brought from the garage, and he was hurried to the hospital in the town; but he died without regaining consciousness.

There was little sleep in the house after that; some of the women were hysterical and required medical attendance, and the men sat up and smoked and talked of various methods of running the bandits to earth.

The alarm was telegraphed to all the neighboring towns, and it was decided that as soon as day dawned the men would start out under the leadership of a deputy sheriff and scour the countryside. It seemed very probable that the ruffians would hide near by until opportunity offered an easy escape out of the region.

As the gray light came in at the windows, the men proceeded to arm themselves with care; the gun-room was depleted of shotguns, and Thorley scraped up a revolver or two.

"Where is Singleton?" he inquired.

"Gone back to bed," sniffed Brooks with contempt.

"But I am sure he intends to go with

you," protested Ethel Thorley in defense of the absent.

"Call Mr. Singleton," said the host sourly to a servant.

Presently the man returned and reported that Mr. Singleton was dressing, and would join the party in a half-hour.

"He seems indifferent to work of this sort," remarked Brooks, with a side glance at Miss Thorley.

"Never mind," said her father, "we will start without him, and he can join us at his pleasure."

When Singleton came down-stairs Miss Thorley greeted him rather coldly.

"They have started," she told him, "and father said you might follow if you cared to."

"Oh, well, now, isn't that too bad?" said Singleton calmly. "I didn't know there was such a rush. And they've taken all the artillery with them, I'll wager."

"Must you be armed *cap-a-pie* to hunt for a few footpads?" asked the girl with some acidity.

"Why, no," laughed Singleton. "I wonder that they cared to go out like a squad of musketeers. I shall be satisfied with one of those stout sticks in the hall-rack; my own is rather light for a combat."

He lighted a cigarette and chose the heaviest stick in his host's collection; then he sauntered forth to trail the posse.

The neighborhood was thoroughly aroused by the cruel death of the groom, and most of the men were assisting in the search; so Singleton had some difficulty in getting information as to the direction the party had taken; but soon he got a general idea of their proposed route, and calculated that he might, by fast walking, come up with them in half an hour.

Over the hills he strode, paying little heed to the quest of the robbers, as the posse had already covered the ground. As he gained a high eminence he saw on the next hilltop, outlined against the sky, several figures. They seemed to pause for a while, and then took up the march and came toward him, evidently retracing their steps.

He at once started down the hilly road to meet them in the valley.

A few clouds had gathered, the sun was obscured, and soon a few large drops fell; then a few more in quicker cadence, and a roaring summer shower broke over the valley. There was no hope of avoiding a soaking; but Singleton turned up his collar and raced for the nearest shelter, which happened to be a deserted shanty that had once done duty as a farmhouse.

As he neared it he saw that the cracked and shrunken door was closed; but he was thinking solely of escaping as much of the rain as possible, and he went at the door like a battering-ram. It was apparently fastened with a rusty old bolt; but the wood gave way, and he landed inside.

It was quite dimly lighted by two small windows, shaded by the wild growth of lilacs outside, and he did not see clearly for an instant; then he looked about him and discovered that he was the center of a group of three.

They had none of the air of peaceable rustics, ready to welcome him to shelter; one black-visaged fellow stood glowering at him and training a vicious-looking derringer menacingly; the other two were prepared to make flank attacks at any moment with a long knife and a black-jack, respectively.

"I fear I intrude," remarked Singleton.

"Well, that's about the size of it," said the man with the gun; "but you'd better stay right where you are, and don't move your hands round too much. I'm pretty nervous, and I might let the gun go off accidental."

Singleton leaned against the table in the middle of the room and tried to preserve some nonchalance, fingering his walking-stick idly, but prepared to grip it firmly and defend himself at any moment.

"What we goin' to do with 'im?" asked the man with the knife.

The man with the gun deliberated for a moment.

"Gag him and tie him up in the garret, I guess," he suggested.

"Pah!" said the fellow with the black-jack; "they'd find 'im within twenty-four hours, and he'd give the police a full description of our mugs and our clothes and everything."

"Well, you tell us what to do with him then," said the first speaker. "Maybe you'd like to take him along with us for a pet."

The desperado thought deeply, glancing over the athletic form of Singleton; then he looked at the walking-stick, the knife, and the revolver, each in turn.

"Kill 'im!" he growled gutturally. "We've done one already; might just as well do two."

The other two flinched slightly, but Singleton held himself together.

"Sir, you are a man of action. There is nothing like thoroughness," he observed coolly.

"Pretty fresh at that," said the man of the gun; "you'd better shut up."

At that moment voices were heard echoing faintly from the valley. Singleton and the robbers started nervously and listened. The posse must be within five hundred yards of the shanty, and the men would be sure to notice that the door had been forced in since they had inspected it in the morning.

"You let out one peep and you're a dead one," said the man with the gun, brandishing it slightly.

"My God! ye're not goin' to stay here like this and wait to see if they're comin' to call, are yer?" demanded another fellow.

"No," said the first; "we'd better gag this lad now and take 'im up in the garret and keep quiet."

The man with the knife set about searching for a rope and a suitable gag, while the other two eyed Singleton as though dreading to lay hands on him. His stick was stout and his eye determined; but he leaned calmly against the table, apparently indifferent to what they were saying or planning.

The voices now sounded much nearer, and Singleton knew that he could make his friends hear if he shouted loudly; but the derringer in the hand of the stupid brute before him had to be reckoned with, as well as the long knife and the bludgeon.

He still toyed with the stick idly to conceal his agitation, and he wondered how far he might depend on his old training as a fencer to defend him with a cane against three more dangerous weapons. If luck were on his side, the

stick was heavy enough to break the wrist of the derring-man in one quick blow, and then the other two might be settled with as many thrusts in the neck, if the direction of his lunge was still reliable.

The odds were unquestionably three to one; but he was a good sportsman, and they didn't seem so heavy. As one's mind turns on the most trivial things at the gravest moments, he thought, for a passing instant, how finely polished and satiny the stick was as it slipped through his fingers; and in the next he started with ill-concealed excitement.

His forefinger had suddenly encountered a peculiar excrescence on the smooth surface of the Malacca. It could mean but one thing; a beautifully finished stick like that would hardly have chance flaws and knots in its surface. His face flushed with pleasure and relief as the little knot yielded to the pressure of his finger; the plain, inoffensive walking-stick was the envelope of one of those little aristocrats of the great family of cold steel, a Damascus dueling-blade—triangular, elastic, tough—with a point as sharp as a cambric needle.

He would have but to press the small button, whip the slender blade from its disguising case, and he would be as well armed as any good fencer cares to be. But the gun might go off first, and he decided that his first move was to strike the weapon from the man's hand; then he could jump back against the door and defend himself against all comers with the naked blade.

The posse was evidently within two hundred yards of the house, but moving slowly; and the man with the gun looked around uneasily as the searcher returned with an old cord, a rag, and a bit of wood. He looked at Singleton almost kindly.

"Now, you be sensible and do as we tell yer, and you'll get along all right," he said.

"Very well," replied Singleton. "What shall I do first?"

"Drop that club and turn yer back," ordered the man; and, as the approaching voices sounded suddenly nearer, he added: "And be blame quick about it!"

"Yes!" shouted Singleton; "let's be quick."

And with the speed of lightning he

brought down the stick upon the wrist of the man before him, knocking the derring-man to the floor and exploding it. At the same time he shouted wildly for help.

As he jumped backward, the man with the knife rushed at him and thrust wildly, before he could draw his new-found weapon; but with an upward motion Singleton buried the ferrule of the stick in the softest part of the man's neck. The fellow went over backward and lay upon the floor without moving.

At that moment the man with the maimed wrist and his remaining pal fled up the stairs to the garret like frightened rabbits, as the door was thrown open and the room swarmed with excited men.

The two men in the garret were soon routed out and handcuffed, and a farm-wagon was procured to take them to the county jail and their apparently lifeless comrade to the hospital. Then the Thorley party made its way home by the shortest route, and Thorley proceeded to celebrate the heroism of Singleton in a truly Pickwickian fashion.

Wine was fetched from the cellar and a repast was laid, and every one had to shake the hero by the hand several times and assure him that no one else would have had the courage to contend with three ruffians single-handed in a half-lighted room. Brooks was a little stiff, remembering his slurs of the morning; but he assured Singleton that it was really a fine thing to do.

"You did just what I expected you would do if you had the opportunity," whispered Ethel Thorley, blushing and pressing his hand more than cordially.

"Oh, now, let me have a word!" laughed Singleton. "I don't want all the glory of this affair without explaining some of the inside of it. You see, I thought I had an ordinary walking-stick when I tumbled into the shanty with those fellows, and I believed I had a rather slim chance in a scrimmage with them; but my household gods were with me, and I suddenly discovered a little button on the stick, which told me that I was armed with a good sword-cane. That gave me a great burst of courage, and without further consideration I plunged into the mess, and they dis-

persed before I had even time to draw my trusty blade."

At this moment, while the audience was listening to the narrative with bated breath, inarticulate, apoplectic sounds drew all eyes to Mr. Thorley, who was seen to be purple in the face from suppressed laughter.

"My word! Oh, Lord! Oh, save me!" he howled, rocking backward and forward and holding his sides.

"What is the matter?" shouted every one at the same time.

"Are you ill, father?" cried Ethel.

"No—no!" he gasped, partially recovering; "but Singleton! Oh, Singleton, you will be the death of me! Didn't you draw that keen blade from its scabbard at all, you rogue?"

"Why, no," answered Singleton. "I found that the danger was over before it had well begun, and I really never thought to look at the blade afterward."

Thorley had a slight relapse, but managed to gasp to the butler who was in attendance:

"Go fetch me that heavy stick from the hall-stand."

The butler brought in the now-famous Malacca cane, and all eyes were turned upon it with reverence; but Thorley seized it and, still shaking with laughter, pressed the button with his fat thumb, took off the upper part of the stick, and disclosed to the view of the astonished audience, in the lower section, the mouth of a glass tube from which he decanted into his wine-glass a fluid which resembled good brandy.

As Singleton and the rest began to recover their wits and grasp the situation, Thorley raised his glass and said:

"I propose a toast to the hero who, armed with his trusty brandy-flask, fought and captured three desperadoes, single-handed."

AT HIS MERCY.

By JOHNSTON McCULLBY,

Author of "Land of Lost Hope," "Shipmates With Horror," etc.

How a great city became practically dead, and the strange conditions encountered by those who braved the perils of the place.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVISIBLE WALL.

AT ten minutes after the hour of noon, on a bright day in April, the South Coast Limited was speeding toward the city of Merton at a rate of sixty miles an hour.

Jerry Calkins, the veteran engineer, grasped the throttle firmly, and his eyes watched closely the twin lines of steel ahead. The train was due at Merton in three minutes, and was seven miles from the Union Station. Calkins was a man who detested being behind time.

Suddenly the locomotive whistle shrieked.

"Well, we're at the junction tower," commented his fireman. "We'll not be more than five minutes late at that. And after all the bad luck we've had—"

"Shut up, you fool!" Calkins cried above the roar of the train. "Five min-

utes amounts to something when we're driving the crack train of the road! Do you take this for an annulled freight? We'll get called by the old man as much as though that five minutes was five hours! This is the last time I'm going to try—What the deuce!"

The fireman gave a cry of alarm. Jerry Calkins answered it with a cry of wonder. Then he swung on the throttle quickly, and stood on the floor of the cab, shaking like a nervous wreck, great drops of perspiration standing out on his face and arms.

"What—what was it?" the fireman gasped.

For the limited, running at a mile a minute, had suddenly stopped, as though it had crashed against a stone wall!

"I—I thought we'd jumped the track!" Jerry gasped. "W-what—"

"We're still on the track!" the fireman cried. "What did it?"

There came a chorus of cries from the coaches and sleepers behind. Passengers poured from the cars and ran alongside the train toward the locomotive.

They had been thrown violently from their seats; many of them had received serious cuts and bruises. They expected to find the results of a head-on collision, to see mangled bodies of engineers, to gaze upon twisted steel where monster locomotives had been before.

Instead, they found the locomotive, tender, baggage and mail cars standing on the track uninjured, looking just the same as though the train had been under the great train-shed at Merton!

"What is it, Jerry?" the conductor cried, pushing his way through the crowd.

"We—we stopped," the engineer muttered.

"I should think you did, and you piled up every one behind you. But why did you stop her?"

"I—I didn't stop her!" the engineer answered. "She stopped while the throttle was wide open, just as I was throwing her open wider after passing the junction tower. I don't know—"

"I thought you'd pulled up to prevent a collision," the conductor went on. "Something the matter with the locomotive, perhaps. Look her over. I'll get these people away, so you can work!"

The conductor turned to the passengers.

"All aboard!" he cried. "All aboard!"

"But why did he stop?" chorused a hundred voices.

The conductor was something of a diplomat, and had the honor of the road at heart. He smiled down at them from his position on the steps of the locomotive.

"Just thank your stars that you were riding behind an engineer who had sense enough to stop the minute he knew something was wrong, instead of taking a chance and wrecking you while you were so near home—and don't ask questions now," he said.

Muttering among themselves at the unsatisfactory reply, the passengers made their way back to the cars. Jerry

and the fireman sprang to the ground immediately, and looked over the locomotive.

"She's as good as the day she came from the shops!" Jerry reported.

"There's nothing wrong with her!"

"Maybe she just had a spasm," the fireman suggested. "Locomotives do funny things sometimes."

"You're right there!" said Jerry.

"Well, we'll try it again."

They got back in the cab, and Jerry backed the long train.

"She seems to be all right now," he remarked. "Confound it! This will put us back another five minutes."

The train came to a stop, and then began to move forward.

"She's all right!" Jerry cried.

"Well, wouldn't this thing jar you?"

"Funny," commented the fireman.

The locomotive arrived at the place where it had stopped so peculiarly before, and it stopped again!

Jerry shut off steam, then opened the throttle slowly, then threw it open quickly, and tried every trick of his profession. But the locomotive seemed glued to that one spot.

He could move the train backward, he could move it forward to a certain point—then it stopped. And the great driving-wheels spun around on the rails just the same, whether the track was sanded or not, but the giant locomotive wouldn't move forward an inch.

Jerry shut off steam again. His face was white, and he was shaking.

"What on earth is it?" the fireman cried.

The conductor had made his way forward a second time, and sprang into the cab to ask questions. Jerry explained all that he knew. The conductor laughed.

Jerry illustrated by backing the train and approaching slowly. There was no doubting for the conductor, then. The engine was under perfect control anywhere except at that particular place on the track. The train would back as far as the engineer desired it, and approach at any speed until it reached that spot—then it would stop suddenly.

"Just like running up against a stone wall," said the fireman.

"But you can see a stone wall," re-

plied the conductor. "And you can't see anything here!"

They made a quick examination of the track. Everything seemed to be all right. The mystery was beyond explaining.

"If there's anything the matter with that locomotive, it's something I've never run across before, and I've railroaded some," Jerry said.

"But there isn't any other explanation," the conductor retorted.

"Well, it is no use to try to run in town again," Jerry went on. "It's time for the outgoing limited to be coming along, too. We'll have to take a siding!"

"I'll send a brakeman back to the junction tower to wire in," the conductor said. "The limited won't come out while we're on this block."

The brakeman was sent back with the report—a report which stated that at a certain place in the track, Jerry's locomotive had stopped like a balky horse, and refused to budge an inch; that it seemed everything was all right as long as no attempt was made to pass that one spot. It was suggested that the outgoing limited run slowly until it had passed the side-tracked ingoing train and the junction tower.

The superintendent swore when he got that message; then he ran down and got on the outgoing limited, and ordered it to proceed. When the train rounded the curve out of the yards, those on its locomotive could see Jerry's train side-tracked and waiting. The track seemed all right.

"Something wrong with Jerry's engine, that's all," muttered the superintendent. "I thought he'd been in the business long enough to know an engine!"

Those on Jerry's locomotive watched closely as the other train approached. It was running slowly, the engineer apparently using great caution. It approached the spot beyond which Jerry's train had refused to go—now it was upon it, now it had passed, and the last car was rattling over it as the foremost cars came abreast of Jerry's locomotive. The superintendent sprang off, and the outgoing train, its locomotive giving a whistle that seemed to be one of derision

to Jerry, dashed away on its long journey.

"Well, wouldn't that jar you?" Jerry exclaimed.

"What's the matter here?" the superintendent cried. "Don't you know how to run an engine? Do you know you've got a few hundred passengers behind you that are swearing at this road and every one connected with it? What's the trouble?"

"I—I don't know, sir," Jerry replied.

He explained at length to the superintendent, and the superintendent laughed, as the conductor had done. Jerry, therefore, demonstrated.

He backed the train and handled it with his usual skill. Then he ran it forward; but when it reached that point in the track, the locomotive jarred and stopped.

"Jumping Jerusalem!" exploded the superintendent. "But we can't stop to explain it now! Send some one back to the tower and order out another engine. Uncouple, Jerry, and leave the train on the main track. Then take that antiquated pile of junk you're running and put it on the side track!"

In time, the other locomotive arrived from the yards. It passed the mysterious stretch of track safely. It coupled on to the limited, and started to pull. The train gathered speed and approached that mysterious spot. Jerry and his fireman and the superintendent stood beside the track, watching.

And when the train reached the spot, it stopped again!

"What the—" the official began.

He ran forward, with Jerry and the fireman at his heels.

The other engineer was swearing and trying everything of which he could think to carry his train beyond that spot.

"Guess my engine's gone back on me, sir," he said, as the superintendent came running up.

The passengers were piling out of the cars again, some of them business men, who looked at their watches and muttered things about the road; others were travelers who were missing connections. They crowded around the superintendent and demanded an explanation. The official was in agony.

"There's only one thing to do," he cried. "We don't know what's the matter, but it is evidently something in the track. We can't make a locomotive go past this spot. You'll have to walk down the track half a mile to the nearest street-car. We'll get your baggage to the station as quickly as possible. If you are sustaining losses, you'll have to sue the road, I guess. I can't help it, and these men of mine can't. We can't take a train past that spot, and that's all there is to it!"

There was a chorus of objections, but they soon ceased, and the passengers returned to the coaches for their hand-baggage. There was nothing to do except to adopt the superintendent's plan.

They started down the track, two traveling men leading the crowd. As they came to the mysterious spot, a few yards away, which the superintendent had pointed out as the one beyond which the train could not go, their interest increased, and they inspected the track.

"Looks like an ordinary track to me, and that outgoing train didn't seem to have any trouble here," one of the traveling men remarked. "That superintendent's lying, for some reason. Hope a hundred sue the road—and get what they sue for! Rotten management!"

The other was walking some distance in front of him. Suddenly he stopped, backed up, started forward, and stopped again. Then he dropped his grip on the ground and went through the pantomime of pushing against something with all his strength.

To the man behind, it looked as though he was pushing against the air.

"Are you crazy, too, pal?" he cried loudly.

The other looked around; his face was white, horror written in every line of it.

"Try to walk past here!" he exclaimed.

"Past where? I don't see anything."

"Neither do I. But try to walk down the track."

"Think I can't? Just watch me!"

But he didn't proceed far. He stopped, as the other had done, and looked around with a puzzled expression on his face.

Then the rest of the crowd caught up

with them, and tried to walk down the track, and could not do it.

At first they were amazed, and then, after repeated futile attempts to move forward, their amazement gave place to terror. What was wrong? Apparently, here was nothing but a stretch of ordinary railroad track, and ordinary atmosphere, but at a certain point it seemed they ran against an invisible wall, and could go no farther.

It doesn't take terror long to fasten itself upon people when it is founded on something seemingly supernatural. In ten minutes the passengers of the limited constituted a frenzied mob. They ran to either side of the track, a hundred yards—two—three hundred—and tried to walk toward the city there, but always it was the same.

A tramp walking out from the city observed the crowd, and wondered what the trouble was. They stopped their crazed actions to watch him. He came on—and *passed the invisible wall*.

They surrounded him, tried to explain, finally persuaded him to try to walk back. He did more than try to walk back. He tried to run back, with fear in his heart, for he thought a crowd of lunatics was at his heels.

And when he reached that invisible wall, he came to a quick stop!

At this juncture, one of the traveling men noticed a team being driven along a near-by road—from the city to the country. It passed out safely. Another team was going toward the city. *It stopped!*

The driver lashed his horses, but they could not move forward. The driver himself started to run ahead to pick up a club that lay in the road—but he couldn't get to the club!

A dog trotted down the track toward the city. When he reached the invisible wall, he stopped, acted peculiarly, then turned tail and fled, howling with all the power of his lungs!

"What does it mean? What does it mean?" the people were crying.

But nobody knew.

Human beings, domestic animals, trains—things animate and inanimate, no matter what their motive power—could pass, coming from the city, to the outside.

But nothing could pass from the outside into the city!

CHAPTER II.

THE ONLY MEN IN TOWN.

THERE was a press telegrapher on Jerry Calkins's train. He offered his services, and was taken back to the junction-tower, where the regular operator was deposed and the more expert man sat down before the key.

He managed to get his wire connected with telegraph headquarters in Merton. Then he tapped out the story.

Headquarters did not believe at first. The chief thought some raving maniac had gained possession of the tower. But soon there came messages from other points—from east and west and north—and they told substantially the same story.

The invisible wall seemed to surround the city!

The newspapers came out with extra editions and made the news public. And the people laughed!

Then the leading paper, a conservative organ, announced that it had sent its best man to the place where Jerry's train was standing, and, that their man, after gathering the facts—*was not able to reenter the city!*

The news spread throughout the town with great rapidity. The electric lines did a thriving business, especially the one which had a terminus within half a mile of where Jerry's train was stalled. Crowds of people left the cars there and hurried down the track toward the crowd outside.

They rushed forward, heard the story from the others, and started to rush back to spread it among later arrivals. And they found they could not get back!

The people were divided into two classes. One class still laughed, and wanted to experiment; the other class thought it some trick, and did not even take the trouble to laugh.

People who journeyed to the invisible wall could see nothing unusual except the peculiar antics of the people outside. Every person went out sure that he, or she, would be able to return where the others had failed. And in this manner

several thousand people found themselves outside when night came, and unable to return.

Business men were separated from their establishments. Employees who worked at night were unable to go to their labor. Husbands were separated from their wives, fathers and mothers from their children.

There was no sleep in Merton that night. The people crowded the business section and discussed the affair. Street preachers took advantage of it. Throngs on every corner read the latest bulletins sent by the telegraphers outside.

Morning dawned upon a scene of terror. Thousands of messages came from the outside, telling relatives and friends to leave the city of mystery. People collected their valuables, drew their money from the banks, and got away as rapidly as possible.

Outgoing trains were crowded. By noon one-third of the two hundred thousand inhabitants had passed out.

And every one found it impossible to return!

At first the outside world laughed, too. But gradually it dawned upon the nation that the story was no hoax. Something unusual was happening at Merton—something unlike anything that had ever happened in history.

Trains carried thousands of excursionists who wanted to test the invisible wall. Scientists rushed to the scene.

In three days Merton was surrounded by a great camp. The Governor of the State ordered out the militia to preserve order. The War Department was appealed to, and a regiment of regular troops sent to aid the State guardsmen.

And out of the city poured the inhabitants, intent only upon quitting the dreaded circle of mystery!

Inside the invisible wall riot reigned. Peace officers, with fear in their hearts, were deserting their posts. Everything was at a standstill. Every one stopped work to leave the city.

At the end of the week the place seemed deserted by women and children, only now and then one being seen, and by all men except a few who remained at their posts, and the criminal class, part of which ignored their fear long enough to profit by the occurrence.

About the end of the first week, therefore, the city of Merton, but a few days before so beautiful and prosperous, was an inferno. A few hundred coarse characters roamed the streets, looting residences and business houses.

Their senses numbed by liquor, they committed every crime of which they could think. One by one they made their way from town, carrying with them their ill-gotten gains.

And after a few days of this, after the first excitement of crime wore away, these low criminals began to fear; and one day, following a night during which there had been a thunder-storm unusually violent, they seemed to rush from the city in a drove, maddened by a fear that had come upon them mysteriously in a moment.

It was that same day that the day-telegraphers at headquarters deserted the wire, absolutely refusing to remain at their posts a moment longer, and the wires went dead.

The thousands outside could get no word. In the junction tower, and in the other near-by telegraph stations outside, operators in vain called headquarters. There was no answer.

Jerry Calkins was at the junction tower, where he spent a great part of his time when not pulling the special trains that ran from the invisible wall to the next division-point on the road. He heard people saying that all of the telegraphers had deserted.

"Not all," he cried. "You can bet my son hasn't."

"Your son?" said the mayor of Merton, who happened to be present.

"Yes, sir. He's on the night-shift. Bob Calkins—that's his name. He's been trained right—and you can bet he hasn't deserted his post."

"But the wire is dead," complained an operator.

"Didn't I say Bob worked *nights*?" demanded Jerry. "You wait until it's time for him to go to work, and he'll be there, ready to do his duty."

"Let us hope so," said the mayor; but the way he said it indicated that he had no hope himself. Personally the mayor didn't blame any one for deserting the city. He had deserted himself.

Bob Calkins roomed with another

night-telegrapher, Fred Haverson. That morning they had gone to their boarding-house as usual and turned in, after a strenuous night's work.

They had the entire house to themselves, and they slept in a bed that had not been made up, and were forced to go to that bed without a meal, except such a one as they evolved from canned goods taken from a little grocery.

The two men awoke about four in the afternoon.

"Well, Bob," Haverson asked, "what are we going to do?"

"Go to work," Bob Calkins answered.

"Are we going to stick?"

"We are!"

"All right—you're the boss."

"You didn't want to throw up your job, did you?" Bob demanded.

"N-no—not exactly. Only, it's getting spooky working in an infernal city like this. Great Scott! How those chaps were tearing the town to pieces yesterday!"

"Dirty ghouls!" commented Bob Calkins. "We're decent, anyway, and we haven't lost our nerve yet. And we've been honest, thank God, in spite of all the temptation we've had! We haven't taken a thing that didn't belong to us, except something to eat from the groceries and the bakeries—and I guess they'd ought to allow us that."

"Speaking of eating—" began Fred.

"We'll eat now," laughed Bob.

"Come along! Got your revolver? That's good! We're liable to need it."

They left the house and walked rapidly toward the central part of the town.

They saw not a single person. Doors stood open; here and there a dog or horse wandered up the street. There was not the usual jangling of street-cars, the rumbling of trucks, the *chug-chug* of motors, the sound of hurrying footsteps. The great silence was oppressive.

"Tis rather spooky," Bob muttered.

"Guess every one's gone," said Fred.

"Nonsense! They're merely so scattered that we don't happen to run into anybody," Bob replied.

They entered a grocery, the doors of which stood wide open, and began debating on what sort of food they would eat.

The store had been ransacked for val-

uables, and presented a weird appearance. Fred Haverson seated himself upon the counter, with a link of sausage in one hand and some crackers in the other. Bob opened two cans of pears and a tin of preserved meat.

"There's no limit to the bill of fare," Bob remarked.

"But this sort of thing is going to get monotonous," Fred objected.

"Well, we can change eating-houses as often as we like," Bob replied. "And we must select some place where we can do a little cooking. Can you make coffee?"

"Sure!"

"Cook meat?"

"Of course."

"Then we're all right. We'll be able to find fresh meat for quite a time in the refrigerators. Then we'll have to descend to bacon. Oh, we'll have plenty to eat as long as we remain in town."

"How about something to drink?" Haverson asked. "The water-works are deserted, of course, and the water in the mains will be getting stale before many days. And neither of us is a boozier."

"We've got all kinds of time to find a well, and the right to look in any one's yard for it," Bob answered. "Forget about those things—we'll get along all right. What we want to think about is this confounded mystery. What on earth do you suppose it is?"

"It's my private opinion," answered Haverson, "that the whole town has gone insane. Fancy not being able to walk through ordinary air! I've got a notion to go out and have a try myself!"

Bob Calkins grasped him by the arm.

"That's exactly what several thousand persons did, and found they were unable to get back," he said. "Don't get to thinking about that. Let's get down to work; maybe they've solved the mystery since morning."

They went on through the deserted city, seeing no one. Bob had been wise enough to take several candles from the grocery.

"We'll need them," he explained to Haverson. "There'll be no electric lights to-night—no workmen at the plant. And we'll not be able to find any kerosene-lamps in the Electrical Building."

"To-morrow," said Haverson, "we'll

go out in the suburbs, find some house where the people formerly burned kerosene, and collect a few lamps."

They reached the great Electrical Building, in which the telegraph company had its headquarters. The operating-room was on the seventh floor, but on the ground floor were the general offices. These were deserted.

"Great Scott! We haven't seen a person on our way down!" Haverson exclaimed.

"Well, we'll find several persons up on the seventh floor ready to eat us alive for being late," Bob replied. "Don't you suppose those day-operators want to get off and have their dinner?"

"I never appreciated an elevator until now," said Haverson, as they began their climb to the seventh floor. Elevator-boys had deserted early in the game.

They reached the seventh floor at last, and started down the long corridor. To their ears came the noise of a sounder—some one seemed to be calling headquarters frantically.

They entered the first room and hung up their hats and coats. No one was there. Then they threw open the door leading to the general operating-room.

No burst of noise welcomed them—no frantic ticking of keys and relays and sounders.

Headquarters was deserted. There was not a single man sitting before a key!

"What—" began Haverson.

"They're gone!" Bob cried.

"But—what—"

"Deserted like the others! Nice bunch of telegraphers!" Bob cried.

"I don't know as I blame them," Haverson said, looking around the room. "This thing is getting on my nerves!"

Bob Calkins hurried over to him and grasped him roughly by the arm.

"Buck up, Fred!" he said. "You've been my particular friend for several years, and I want you to stick by me now."

"You're going to stay—when every one else is gone?" Haverson asked.

"We're going to stay," replied Bob.

"But—"

"Nonsense, man! Forget the infernal mystery, and play that you are a boy out for a lark. Who ever had such a chance before? Why, we've got the whole city

for a playground! You can play at mayor, and I'll be the council, and we'll close the saloons and have all sorts of fun. We'll be famous, Fred—only men with nerve enough to stay in Merton, and all that!"

Bob didn't care for the fame, but he was trying to make Haverson see the thing in a different light.

"And what's the harm?" he went on. "No one has been hurt in the city. Nothing unusual has happened here. It's just that confounded so-called invisible wall out there that keeps everything out, and that has frightened the people half to death! We don't know anything about it, and we don't care! We'll just hold down our jobs! Think of the fun of being the only people that can tell those outside what is going on—the only telegraphers in town!"

"And I guess the only men in the city," added Haverson. "We didn't see any one, remember."

"Then it's all the better. Won't you stick with me, Fred? There's no plague or disease, and nothing, it seems, to harm us. Stick until we are frightened by something worse than that invisible wall, anyway."

"I—I don't know—" Fred began.

"Come on, old man, don't be a coward! There'll be two of us, remember. We'll have all sorts of fun. But it's not the fun, Fred. Some one ought to be in town, and we're the only ones left that can use a key. We're the historians of this affair, Fred. We can write magazine articles when we get out, if we want to. And then we ought to hold down our jobs."

"But even the chief has left," protested Fred.

"What do we care? You can play chief, if you want to. Let's be game enough to stick to our posts."

Fred walked to the window and looked out at the lifeless street below.

"I've got no one in the world except my old dad," said Bob. "He was pulling the train that first ran into the wall. I'd rather run the risk of never seeing him again than to desert now and have him call me a coward—and that's what he'd do!"

Haverson whirled upon him.

"I haven't any one, Bob," he said—

"not even an old father! If you have nerve enough to stay, so have I!"

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIES AND A VOICE.

At the junction tower the operator kept stabbing at the key, calling headquarters in Merton. He got no answer.

Old Jerry Calkins, who stood near, was looking at his watch.

"In five minutes my boy will report for work," he said, "and then you'll get an answer."

"I doubt it," muttered the operator to the mayor, who was bending over the key. "I swear I wouldn't stick in town, not knowing what sort of an infernal thing is going on in this neighborhood."

The five minutes passed, and still the operator's call went unanswered. Another five minutes were ticked off. There was a trace of keen disappointment and pain in Jerry's face.

"The boy'll be there, if he's alive," he kept repeating. "He won't desert—he won't desert."

"It's too much for the boy's nerves, Jerry," said the mayor kindly.

"He'll be there, I say—if he's alive."

Just then the wire was "broken," the operator shut his key with a snap, the wire was opened again, and there came the answer to the call:

"I."

"Merton? Merton?" questioned the tower operator.

"I."

"Who's talking?"

"Calkins."

The tower operator turned around in his chair.

"Calkins talking. The old engineer was right," he said.

"I knew it," Jerry cried. "I knew my boy wouldn't desert."

But the operator had turned to the key again, and was asking questions as rapidly as he could tick them off. When the answers came he called them aloud.

"How's everything?" he inquired.

"Every one has deserted. We found headquarters without anybody on duty."

"Any one left in town?"

"We didn't see a person on our way to work."

"You say we. Who's the other one?"

"Haverson. He's with me."

"Will you stick?" the tower operator demanded.

"Yes."

The wire was "broken" again, and from miles across the country there came a message from the division chief, who had been listening:

"Your message overheard. Superintendent of company says he thanks Calkins and Haverson for their nerve and attention to duty. Asks that they assume charge of office and company's property, and arrange it among themselves so that one man will be on duty all the time. The company will pay each of you fifty dollars a day, and in addition will not forget your service."

Haverson was standing over Bob's key when that message came in.

"Tell him we'll stick with or without that raise of pay," he said.

But Bob was already working the key, and that information was wired to the superintendent.

Then Fred went to another key and talked with the north, while Bob remained talking to the south through the junction tower. Bob asked whether any progress had been made toward solving the mystery.

"Scientists are now making their way completely around the city, following the invisible wall," came the reply. "Expect to arrive back at tower to-night some time, and turn in report. What are conditions inside?"

"Criminals looted city," Bob wired. "Stores and residences broken open and articles of value taken. Several bank vaults blown open."

"Troops are searching every one who comes out," was the answer, "and have already arrested many of the looters. What else?"

"We are taking liberty of getting food in groceries and bakeries. Water in mains is growing stale, but we'll locate a well. Guess we'll have to find an oil-stove and cook up here in the operating-room, if we have to be on duty continually. No lights, of course, except candles. Believe the city is wholly deserted. Went up on tower of building, and couldn't locate a human being on any street as far as I could see. Growing dark now,

but can't see lights anywhere, except outside invisible wall."

Bob closed the key, and the tower operator broke in.

"Mayor instructs yourself and Haverson to use all stores necessary and make yourselves comfortable. If you see anything suspicious, report immediately. Be careful to keep wire in order at your end. The city is cut off from the world if this wire goes down."

"We'll be careful," Bob wired.

"Your father sends his regards, and says for you to stick."

"Tell dad I'll stick."

There was silence then, for a time. Fred had given the same information to the north, and the two operators, having nothing more to wire, walked to the window and glanced over the city.

There was not a flash of light, not a sound from those streets which were usually thronged at that hour. From the distance came the bay of a dog. It was, indeed, a dead city. Far away they could see lights where the crowds surrounded the town outside the invisible wall.

"Rather lonesome here," observed Fred.

"But it's all right, just the same," added Bob quickly. "Everything depends upon us now, Fred."

Just then Haverson uttered a cry. Bob sprang to the window again. What he saw startled him.

Throughout the city row after row of street lights were flashing. Gradually the entire city was illuminated. Incandescents glowed on roof-gardens, and before theaters. But for the absence of human beings the dead city was alive once more.

"What does it mean?" Haverson cried.

"Some good chap has stuck to his job, that's all," Bob answered. "Let's say 'hallo' to him!"

He rushed to the telephone to call the electric-plant. But after he had stood at the instrument for a moment he made a grimace and hung up the receiver.

"I forgot," he said. "The Central girls are not at work."

"I'm sorry we can't talk to the fellows at the plant," added Haverson. "It would help some if we could. We might even get them to eat with us. No sense

in running the electric lights, from what I can see."

"Look out of the other window," instructed Bob, "and see if you can see the smoke from the plant. You generally can see it from there. It'll cure your lonesomeness."

Fred hurried to the window.

"Why, there's no smoke!" he cried. "That's funny, too. You can always see a cloud of it in front of the lights at the railroad shops."

"No smoke?" laughed Bob.

He went over to look. Fred had spoken the truth. There was not a bit of smoke hanging over the power-house.

"You can't run all the electric lights in town without making some smoke," said Haverson. "What do you suppose—"

A call at one of the sounders interrupted him. Bob answered it. It was the tower.

"City seems lit," said the tower operator.

"All street lights and incandescents burning," Bob answered.

"Peculiar," went on the tower. "President of light company is here, and says all his employees left plant yesterday with exception of foreman and one crew, and they came out to-day. Absolutely no electricians at plant. Can you explain?"

"Seems to be no smoke coming from plant," replied Bob.

The next question rather staggered the two operators:

"If power for lights is not generated at plant where does it come from?"

"Don't know," Bob said.

Just then Fred ran back from the window.

"The lights have gone out!" he cried.

And as he spoke the incandescents went out also, and the operating-room was left with the uncertain glow from the candles.

"Lights just went out—all of them," Bob wired.

"Noticed it," replied the tower.

"Wire if anything else unusual occurs." Bob got up and left the key.

"I guess that's enough unusual stuff for one night," he said. "Where do you suppose that power came from, Fred?"

"I haven't any idea."

"It didn't come from the plant; that much is certain. They can't generate power down there without burning coal and making smoke. What do you suppose—"

He stopped, and glanced at Haverson with an expression of wonderment in his face. The telephone bell was ringing.

"Somebody's alive in this old town besides us, after all," Bob gasped. "Answer it, Fred, while I watch the key."

Haverson sprang to the telephone and took down the receiver.

"Hallo! Hallo!" he called. "Then he took his ear away quickly. "The confounded chump—whoever it is—doesn't stop ringing," he exclaimed. "He won't give me a chance to talk. Listen to him ring."

Bob rushed to the instrument and put the receiver to his ear. There was a buzz—the telephone was still ringing.

"That's a nice trick," he commented. "If some maniac has got into the telephone-office and cooked this up—"

He ceased speaking, and his jaw dropped.

"What is it?" Haverson asked.

"Listen. Over here by the door. What do you hear?"

"Why, other phones are ringing."

"I should say they are. Let's go into the hall."

They went into the corridor. To their ears came the incessant ringing.

"Every bell in the building is going!" exclaimed Fred.

"What on earth do you suppose—" Bob began, and then he saw the look in Haverson's face and stopped.

"Well, I hope whoever is doing it will get tired pretty soon," he added. "This confounded noise—"

"I believe other bells besides those in our building are ringing," Fred interrupted. "Come here by the window."

"Sounds like it," Bob assented, "but we can't tell from here. Remember, there are several hundred telephones in this building."

"You'd think there were several thousand from the noise they make. I'm getting nervous."

"Don't!" snapped Bob.

They stood beside the window listening. It was enough to make any one nervous—the great dark, dead city, with

not a sound in it except the ringing of thousands of telephone-bells. And the ringing continued. Five minutes passed—ten—fifteen.

"Will it never stop?" Haverson cried. "What can it be? I don't see how mortal man could do it."

"Mortal man is doing it, all right. You can bet on that!" exclaimed Bob.

"The noise will set me crazy," Haverson insisted.

It was bad for the nerves—doubly bad under the circumstances. Twenty minutes after the ringing of the bells began both operators were walking the floor of the room, holding their hands to their ears.

"We've got to stop this," said Bob, "if we have to unhook every receiver in the building."

"Let's begin with this floor, and try it," Fred suggested.

"I'd better call the tower and report," Bob added. "Take a candle and begin operations."

Haverson lit a candle and went out, to enter room after room and take the receiver off the telephone-hook. Bob Calkins sat down before the key and called the tower.

"I," the tower answered.

"Every telephone-bell in city, as well as we can judge, is ringing," Bob reported, "and has been ringing for almost half an hour. 'We're not sure about the entire city, of course, but we know that every bell in our building, and bells in some adjoining buildings, are at work.'"

"No one talks over the telephone?" came the question.

"No; the bell will not stop ringing. The noise is setting us crazy. Haverson is going through the building taking the receivers off the hooks."

"I will report to scientists when they return," said the tower operator.

"O. K.," answered Bob.

As he closed the key Haverson stumbled back into the room, his face white.

"Great Scott! I can't do any more alone," he gasped. "It's awful. Bob, I'm—I'm afraid!"

"Buck up, old man. Of course I know it is creepy, but telephone-bells can't hurt us."

"It isn't the bells. It's the fact that

all this is so blamed mysterious that all the bells are ringing, and we do not know why. I wonder what next?"

"It is hard to tell. There—"

The bells suddenly stopped. Have you ever been plunged, in the twinkling of an eye, from a fearful din into complete silence? Even if you have not, you can imagine the result. The silence seemed oppressive—seemed to pain.

"This—this is awful!" Haverson gasped.

There came another quick ring at the telephone-bell, just an ordinary ring, such as an ordinary "Central" might give. Bob ran to the instrument and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hallo!" he cried, looking back at Haverson and winking.

To his surprise an answer came back, in a man's voice:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Hallo! Who are you?" Bob cried.

Fred ran to his side, and stood waiting.

Bob's question was not answered. Instead, a sepulchral voice, full and deep, which seemed to speak in measured accents, said:

"The city is doomed! This is your last warning. You have until noon tomorrow to get outside the town."

"Say, old man, what is this—a joke?" asked Bob.

"Your last warning," came the voice over the wire. "The city is doomed. It is in my power. No mercy will be shown you after noon to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

A WARNING ON THE WIRE.

THE receiver dropped from Bob's nerveless hand. For fully a minute he and Haverson faced each other without speaking. The ticking of the sounder broke the spell.

"What—what do you think?" Fred demanded.

"Some one's ghastly joke," commented Bob, though he didn't feel sure about it.

He knew that Fred was at the point of giving way, however, and he wanted to prevent that.

He sprang to the key; it was the junction tower calling.

"Anything new?" the tower asked.

"Plenty," Bob replied.

Then he told the tower operator of the whole affair, even going so far as to describe the voice to the best of his ability. The tower operator answered that he would give the report to the authorities and also to the scientists.

"The scientists have returned," he added, "and are now holding a council."

Bob closed the key, and walked with Haverson to the window. The moon had risen bright and full, and the great city looked indeed like a silent tomb in the pale moonlight.

The muddled voice of an intoxicated loafer would have been sweet music, the clang of a street-car gong welcome indeed.

"Are—are we going to stay—after getting that message over the telephone?" Fred asked.

"Of course we'll stay!" Bob replied. "Don't let that message frighten you! I have an idea a few clever thieves have remained behind, have connected the telephones at central, and, after ringing every instrument in town, have given that message. Don't you see? They thought every person who remained would answer the telephone and hear them, they would frighten those who stayed and make them leave, and then the city would be theirs."

"But, if they locate us—"

"How'll they do that, unless they happen to see us? How will they ever find two men in all this town, not knowing where to look, when there are so many thousands of buildings and so many places for a man to hide? Let's fight it out a little longer, anyway."

"I'm with you—as long as we can stand it," Haverson replied.

Bob realized that his one object was to keep Haverson busy, keep him so busy that he wouldn't have time to think about things and let the mysteries get on his nerves. That would be easy in the morning, for they could gather supplies, but there was nothing to do at night. Haverson would not sleep—said he could not sleep. And the night dragged terribly.

An hour or so passed, and then the junction tower called again. Bob sat down before the key, and Haverson stood beside him.

"I," Bob replied to the call.

"Scientists have concluded their session and have formulated report," the message said. "You are asked to give them all the aid in your power, as you are believed to be the only honest men left inside, and everything depends upon you. Please give best of attention as I wire report, and ask all the questions you desire, so there will be a complete understanding. Is the other operator there?"

"I," Bob answered.

"Have him read message also."

"I," flashed the answer.

"Attention! Scientists have completed circuit of the city, and find that invisible wall extends completely around it. They examined every few inches, and found no loophole. It begins on the ground and extends at least thirty feet in air on the perpendicular; it may run beyond that, but they had no means to investigate.

"This peculiar wall is nothing, seemingly, except ordinary air, except that it does not give the least fraction, and to push against it is like pushing against a wall of brick or stone. The atmosphere has no unusual color or odor, though the delicate instruments used showed a slight bluish tinge in the air at times, which may or not be due to the present condition of the ether, or to a slight electrical disturbance following the thunder-storm of a day ago.

"While the thing is a mystery and never dreamed of before, the scientists are of the opinion—merely an opinion, this, without scientific truths to make it a fact—that some peculiar force is at work, but that the force is exerted by a human being or human beings who have discovered something sensationally new in physics. The experts are at a loss to designate the nature of this force—if such it may be called.

"The greatest mystery is that, while no one can enter from the outside, anything can come from the inside without trouble and without experiencing any unusual feeling. Are you getting this all right?"

"O. K.," Bob tapped.

"Now, listen! This has been discovered: The invisible wall surrounding the city follows closely the outside rail of the Merton Belt Line Traction Compa-

ny's road. At first the scientists were of the opinion that the peculiar force was being exerted through this rail, but upon close examination they could find no indications that such was a fact. They knew also, of course, that the traction company has not completed its work, and that while it has constructed its rough road-bed and laid its rails, there has been no electrical installation as yet—no trolley wire, or even poles to support one.

"It is the opinion of the experts, therefore, that the person or persons who are exerting this peculiar new and wonderful force are merely using the outside rail of the belt line as a boundary because it was easy to establish and follow and is just outside the city limits all the way around the town.

"They are of the opinion that this force, whatever it is, is being manufactured inside the city, and that therefore persons, or at least one person, with some ulterior motive against the city, is within its limits doing his, or their, diabolical work. You are instructed to watch. Be careful, as everything depends upon you two men.

"Do not risk yourselves any more than is absolutely necessary. Try to keep out of sight. The persons doing this work are perhaps hidden, but the scientists say such a great force cannot be exerted without considerable work, no matter what its nature, and they ask you to watch for smoke or any indication that power of any sort is being generated.

"Your recent message concerning the telephone warning was shown them, and they are more than ever convinced that it is human beings we are fighting, and not some supernatural force. They say again that everything depends upon you two men, and while you are not asked to risk your lives, you are asked to do everything possible before leaving the city to solve the mystery."

"O. K.," flashed Bob.

"Will you stick?" the tower operator demanded.

"We'll stick," Bob wired.

He closed the key, and whirled around to face Haverson.

"Funny!" Fred commented.

"Looks mighty plain to me," said Bob. "Some scoundrel has discovered a great secret of physics, and is using his discov-

ery for ill instead of good—that's all. What he intends to do with this city is more than we know. I don't think he'll destroy it—I have an idea that he has frightened the people away, and is using his confounded invisible wall to keep them out, so that he and his confederates, if he has any, can loot and enrich themselves. There are fortunes upon fortunes left in town, in spite of the looting that has occurred already."

"You forget one thing," Haverson replied. "The city is surrounded by people, by troops and officers. How will this man—if it is a man—be able to take away his loot after he collects it?"

Bob Calkins laughed.

"I have an idea," he said, "that if I was powerful enough to keep people and animals and even railroad trains from passing through a section of ordinary air, I'd be powerful enough to take away all the loot I could collect."

"Well, I wish we'd never encountered this freak situation," Fred answered. "But, since we have, I suppose we can make the best of it. I hope those scientists have the correct idea, and that it is human beings we are pitted against. If that is true, it isn't so bad. I can't say I'll run away from ordinary human beings unless they get too strong for us. But the man that can make an invisible wall is perhaps also strong enough to destroy two men like ourselves."

"We have until noon to-morrow, anyway," said Bob.

"Until noon to-day, you mean. It is two o'clock in the morning now."

"Anyway, I think the fellow who talked over the telephone is working a big bluff," Calkins went on. "He doesn't know exactly where we are, and so we have the advantage of him."

"But we aren't sure he doesn't know where we are," protested Haverson.

"Well, let's stop talking about it, keep our eyes open, and take the chance," Bob replied. "I'd rather die trying to do something than face my old dad after deserting. I know what he'd tell me, and it wouldn't be complimentary—you can bet on that."

The sounder began its ticking again, and Bob went to the key.

"If you want to gather supplies," the tower operator wired, "it is suggested

that you leave the operating-room this morning between eight and ten o'clock. That will give you two hours, which is ample time. We'll understand where you are, and not think it unusual if you do not answer during that time. If you don't answer soon after ten o'clock, however, we'll know there is something wrong."

"Good plan, and we'll abide by it," Bob answered.

He closed the key, but immediately there came another call, and he turned to answer it.

"I," he said.

"You will do well," came the message, "to leave the city at daybreak. You have been warned."

"Great Scott!" cried Haverson.

"Wait!" Bob implored.

He worked the key, calling the tower.

"Did you send that message?" he demanded.

"No," the tower answered.

"Then who in the world—" Bob began.

The circuit opened; Bob closed the key, and then came more words from the unknown operator.

"I am the master of the world. I admire brave men, but say to the two operators in the Electrical Building that resistance is useless. Leave the city at daybreak; it will not be safe for you to remain longer than noon to-morrow. This is the last warning."

"Some operator along the line joking," Bob wired to the tower.

The answer came immediately:

"Cut out wire except from tower to headquarters, and sec."

This was immediately done. The tower operator reported soon that communication beyond the tower had been interrupted.

Then the mysterious operator cut in.

"You see? It is not some operator fooling. I am master of the world, and I warn you because I admire brave men. But I do not admire them enough to allow them to prevent me from accomplishing my purpose. Leave the city before noon to-morrow."

"Are you the fellow who telephoned?" Bob demanded on the key.

"I."

"And who turned the lights on and off?"

"I."

"Well, what else can you do? Did you throw the invisible wall around the city?"

"I."

"That confounded thing is the work of human hands, then?"

"The work of a brain," came the egotistical answer—"the work of the greatest brain in the world. Are you satisfied?"

"I'm satisfied that you are the greatest scoundrel of the age," Bob replied. "You're nothing but a man, in spite of your confounded mysterious power—a man that uses his brain for evil instead of good, and I've never yet met a man I was afraid of."

"If you are wise, you will be afraid of me," came the answer.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST BLOW.

"WELL, what do you think of that?" Bob asked Haverson, turning from the key.

The tower operator had cut off, and was reporting the conversation, Bob supposed, to the authorities.

"What do you think about it?" Fred demanded in return.

"I think it is some maniac with a great deal of nerve and bluff."

"But you are not remembering the invisible wall. A man that can create that is liable to be able to do anything."

"I'm not forgetting the invisible wall," Bob retorted, "but I want to see him do something else—something that actually threatens us—before I run away from him. What do you think of the report of the scientists?"

"They talked a lot without saying anything," Haverson replied. "They seem to be as far from solving the mystery as before."

"You noticed what they said about the belt-line track?"

"Yes, but they also said they believed it was merely used as a boundary for the wall. What is the history of the belt line?"

"It is innocent enough," explained Bob. "Some months ago a corporation headed by a man named Hellinger se-

cured rights from the county and State, made arrangements with property owners, and started to build an electric belt line around the city just outside the limits.

"Their intention, I believe, is to radiate from this circular belt line other electric lines running into different parts of the State. You see, every car, no matter from what direction it approached, was to 'loop the loop,' and enable passengers to reach almost any part of the city.

"The belt-line track has been roughly laid, but no poles or trolley wires have been erected yet, and the power plant, I understand, has only a part of the electrical machinery installed. I'm inclined to agree with the opinion of the scientists that the belt line has nothing to do with the mystery except that it has been chosen as a natural boundary for the invisible wall.

"If there were wires and a general electrical installation along the line, I might think that the belt line was connected more closely with the mystery."

"Are we going to remain here in the face of the warnings we have received?" Fred asked.

"Yes," replied Bob firmly. "At least, we'll remain as long as we can. It'll take more than a bluff to drive us out."

"All right," laughed Haverson. "I can stand it if you can."

Bob walked back and forth in the room for a time, and finally stood for several minutes looking out of the window over the city.

"Fred," he said finally, "we're going to move."

"To move?" Haverson cried.

"Yes—move. That chap—whoever he is—knows where we are, and if he wanted to start any devilment he'd know where to find us. Here we are seven stories from the ground—and he'd have a chance to cut us off and starve us out if he couldn't get us out any other way."

"But where'll we go?" Haverson inquired.

"We'll take an emergency outfit and go to some other building, where we'll make connections with the tower wire. Down at the branch office on Washington Avenue the wires leave the conduits and run over the buildings for several blocks.

We'll make a connection there, run the wire into some obscure building, and go to work as usual. And we must do it immediately—before daylight."

"But he'll find us," objected Fred.

"Perhaps, but he'll have to look for us first, and he'll not know exactly where to look. We'll gain time, at any rate."

They began their preparations immediately. While Haverson went to the storerooms and gathered the necessary paraphernalia, Bob sat down before the key and called the junction tower.

"Do not call us, or expect us to answer, for an hour or so," he wired. "Wait until we call you."

"Why?" the tower demanded.

"Can't tell you, for obvious reasons. And when we call again, understand that we talk to tower only, and not to other stations outside city. We can't trouble to talk to more than one station. Every thing must go through tower."

"O. K.," the tower flashed.

Fred entered the operating-room as Bob finished, and they gathered up the things and went into the corridor and began the descent to the street.

It was bright moonlight, and they tried to keep in the shadows as much as possible, because they did not know what to expect or whom to expect.

They had not walked three blocks before every electric light in the city suddenly flashed and remained burning.

"He's trying to spot us," Bob cried.

"Down this alley here! And keep out of the light as much as possible."

They hurried on, block after block, crossing street after street. Bob stopped at a cigar-store and took a box of cigars. Fred invaded a grocery to get cheese and crackers. And then they hurried on.

They reached the building which contained the branch office, and Bob led the way up-stairs and to the roof. There Bob tapped wire after wire, until they found the one which ran south, and got an answer from the tower.

Then they followed this wire over several buildings, until they came to the one on the corner.

"I guess this building will do as well as any," Bob said. "Of course, we don't want to locate in the branch office, for that's as bad as being in headquarters. We'll run a wire into this building. It's

an old one, and about the last place any one would look for us."

They worked frantically, for a red streak in the east told them that daylight would soon be at hand. The electric lights went out again, and they had to use candles. After making the proper connection, they carried the wire through a trap-door in the roof, down a long ladder, through a musty garret, and so to the top floor. Then they took it down the stairs, floor after floor, until the ground was reached.

On the corner was a jewelry-store. In the rear was a small room originally designed as a workshop, with ample light from windows and skylight. The back room could not be seen from the street. It was an ideal place for their project.

While Haverson fastened a key and sounder to a table and went about putting the apparatus in working order, Bob left the building and hurried across the street to a grocery-store. He filled a large box with food and carried it back to the little rear room.

Fred went with him on the next trip, and before they finished they had an ample store of provisions in their new headquarters.

Bob rifled a hardware-store for an oil-stove. Fred got five gallons of oil from the grocery. Then they both went to a furniture establishment, and carried back a cot and two chairs, one a rocker.

On their last trip they entered a dry-goods emporium and selected heavy blankets and a few towels.

It was dawn now; too light for them to be in the streets unless they wished to risk discovery.

"Breakfast!" Bob demanded, and, laughing, he began to prepare it.

They didn't have to leave the rear room for water; and soon they sat down to fried eggs and bacon, and coffee which, Bob declared, was not quite as good as they were used to having, but a great deal better than nothing.

"And now," said Haverson, "we'd better call the tower."

Fred called, and the tower operator answered immediately.

"Thought you had disappeared," he said.

"We're still on the job," Fred replied.

"Why did you take that hour off?"

"Don't ask questions, because we can't answer them," Fred tapped.

The wire "broke," and the unknown operator cut in.

"It is now break of day," he said.

"I trust you men remember my warning. You have until noon to leave the city of Merton."

"We've decided to stay a little longer," Bob said, for he had relieved Fred at the key when the unknown cut in.

"You are warned. I'll say no more!"

"We'll not be sorry to be deprived of your conversation," Bob wired.

"Fool!" came the solitary word as answer. Then the wire was still.

An hour after that, the operator in the junction tower, out of the kindness of his heart, began to give Bob and Haverson a condensed report of the doings in the outer world.

Congress, the report said, had appointed a committee to proceed to the city of Merton and make an investigation. Distinguished scientists were coming from abroad. The eyes of the world were upon Merton, and upon the two operators there, who braved an unknown peril to give to those outside a truthful description of what was taking place within.

Those who were formerly residents of Merton, and especially those who had interests there, were frantic. Millions of dollars' worth of property was at the mercy of the mysterious unknown who called himself master of the world.

Haverson stood at Bob's side as this report was coming in. There was not much to interest them, but it served to pass away the time. In fact, the time passed faster than they realized. The tower operator ceased sending, and Bob whirled around to talk to Fred.

"I don't like this hero business," he said. "We're just attending to our duty, that's all."

There came a call on the sounder, and Bob answered. It was the mysterious unknown.

"Do you realize that it is ten o'clock in the morning, and that you have only two hours in which to leave the city?" he demanded.

"Didn't realize it was so late," Bob

flashed. "We've been getting the news."

"I heard you," came the answer. "You'd better move now."

"We're very comfortable, thanks!"

"I have warned you to leave by noon."

"But we prefer to remain," said Bob.

The answer rather startled them:

"At one minute after the hour of noon I will destroy the high tower on the Electrical Building. After that, I shall exert forces over which I have control, and gradually demolish the building, floor by floor."

"Pardon me, old man, but that reads like a lie," wired Bob.

"You are brainless to doubt my power. Have I not already demonstrated it?"

"Just the same, we aren't going to run away from town," answered Bob.

"Then the city will be your tomb," said the unknown. "I have given my last warning!"

Bob whirled around and faced Haverson.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Well, he'll not injure us particularly by destroying the Electrical Building," Fred answered. "Personally, I am glad we moved. I don't believe he can do it, of course, but I don't want to be in that building and run the risk while he conducts any experiments. We're ten blocks away, thank goodness!"

"And, from this rear window," said Bob, "we can see the tower and the upper three stories of the Electrical Building. If there is any destruction, we can see it from here. I don't care for a ringside seat at any exhibition like our friend promises."

"Neither do I," added Fred.

The tower operator called them again, and Fred, who was nearest the key, answered him.

"We have overheard peculiar message you just received," the tower operator said. "Scientists ask you to watch closely and report any unusual occurrences, if there are any. They want it understood, however, that this service is optional on your part. If you really think there is danger, they want you to feel at liberty to leave."

Bob pushed Fred to one side and took charge of the key.

"This is Calkins talking," he wired.

"Is my father in the tower?"

"Yes."

"Ask him whether I shall remain or come out."

There was silence for a moment, then the answer came:

"Your father says for you not to be a coward!"

"Tell him I'll not," Bob replied, and closed the key.

He faced Haverson again.

"You heard that?" he asked. "My dad will have to leave the road soon, because he's getting old. Of course, he owns his little place here in town, but that's about all, and he looks to me to support him in his old age. *He* tells me to stick!"

"We'll stick!" Fred said.

At five minutes before noon the unknown operator called them, and Bob answered.

"You are going to remain?" the unknown asked.

"We are."

"Very well! You'll soon know better than to doubt."

Bob did not answer that; it seemed that no answer was necessary. With Haverson, he walked to the window, where, by looking over the tops of the small buildings across a near-by square, they could see the lofty tower of the Electrical Building, and two or three stories below it.

"It is noon," Bob said.

They turned their eyes to the tower.

Suddenly it crumbled into fragments and fell!

They could hear the great crash, as stone was hurled downward hundreds of feet to the roofs of other buildings, and to the streets!

CHAPTER VI.

THE CITY'S DEATH-WARRANT.

THEIR faces blanched, their hearts beating like trip-hammers, their eyes bulging—they watched the destruction.

Another minute, and then the top story of the great structure began to crumble away. First a corner of it

seemed to fall to pieces, and then the destruction spread, and sections of the building were thrown outward with great force. Finally the upper story was gone.

There was no smoke, no flame, nothing to indicate the nature of the destructive force. The building simply stood, then fell.

As they watched, the next story began to go. And then the third from the top disappeared, and then there arose from the ground great clouds of dust that obscured the view.

But crashes and shocks told that the building was being demolished, story by story, floor by floor, as the unknown had threatened.

Haverson's quick sob of fear brought Bob back to the realization of things.

"Well, he's done it!" Bob exclaimed.

"But how—with what?"

"Don't ask me; I'm not up to solving this mystery. I'm sorry that building is gone, for I was proud of it—proud that I had a job in it. But it needn't bother us any. I fixed the wire, of course. We can use it, even if the Electrical Building has been demolished."

He turned to the window again. The crashes had ceased. The dust clouds still filled the air; but as they watched, these clouds gradually settled, and they saw that where the Electrical Building had stood there was now nothing but air. Bob leading the way, they ran to the roof of the building to which they had moved. From the roof they could look across the square.

They saw a mass of ruins. Heaps of stone and mortar, and wood crushed to kindling. The building had been torn to pieces. Great steel beams and girders were twisted and gnarled as though they had been grape-vines.

Bob noticed one thing—the ruins showed that the power of destruction, whatever it was, had come from the north. The demolished building had been scattered toward the south over the square.

"If we had been there—" Haverson began.

"But we were not," laughed Bob.

It wasn't a natural laugh; there was nervousness and a little fear in it, but it had the effect of calming them.

They rushed back down the stairs and to their room. The tower operator was calling them repeatedly. Bob answered.

"What happened?" was asked.

"Electrical Building mass of ruins," Bob wired, and then he waited.

He could picture the scene in the junction tower—the white faces, the fear expressed in them, the bewilderment of the scientific experts. Presently the junction tower spoke again:

"Kindly answer questions as nearly correct as possible. What seemed to be manner of destruction?"

"Could not tell," Bob replied. "We watched from window. Tower seemed to crumble and fall toward the south. After short interval upper story began to go, beginning at corner and spreading gradually. Building gradually torn to pieces."

"Any smoke or flame?"

"No."

"Sound of explosion?"

"No."

"Nothing at all to denote nature of destructive power?"

"No," Bob replied.

"Entire building destroyed, you say?"

"Yes; nothing left but mass of ruins scattered over public square."

"Yet you are alive?"

"Yes; Haverson and I are all right."

"How does that happen? How does it happen wires are in order?"

Bob hesitated about replying, but finally reached for the key.

"We anticipated trouble and moved headquarters," he said. "That was what we were doing early this morning when we took that two hours off. Connected emergency wire and arranged things so that destruction of building did not cut us off."

There was a pause; then word from the superintendent, who, evidently, had been listening to the conversation.

"Good work, boys; the company will not forget this."

The junction tower cut in again:

"Are you in a safe place?"

"Don't know whether any place in town is safe or not," answered Bob, "but I guess we're in a place where we'll not be found easily."

"Be careful," came the warning from the superintendent.

The dots and dashes ceased. Bob left the key and helped Haverson open some food. As they ate, they discussed the situation.

"What are we going to do?" Fred asked. "I can't see any particular use in remaining here, except that we'll be able to tell the outside world how the city is destroyed. We aren't stopping the destruction, and we're not helping the people outside to get in."

"I've been thinking of that," Bob said. "But how can we stop the work of this scoundrel, whoever he is, when we do not know how his work is done and don't know where he is? A man who can destroy a great building as easily as he has done can do almost anything. So we'll have to be careful how we go about it."

"I take it for granted that we are the only people inside the town, except himself. If we try to conquer him and make a bad break, he'll be liable to destroy us, and then the city would be at his mercy even more than now. The only thing we can do, as I see it now, is to take it easy and try to locate him, and after we do that we can move accordingly."

"Do you think he will destroy the entire city?" Haverson inquired.

"I don't know what to think," confessed Bob. "I can't imagine his object. If it is to loot the town, he'll not destroy it—at least, not until he has done the looting."

"But how can he hope to escape?" asked Fred, "if he loots the town? It is surrounded by troops, and they'll catch him if he attempts to leave with his plunder."

"A man who can destroy a building as easily as he did—" began Bob.

Fred did not say more. It was evident that they faced a problem beyond their comprehension.

"Well," Bob added, "we can wait."

"Do you suppose he thinks we were destroyed in the Electrical Building?" Fred remarked.

"That's what I'd like to know," said Bob. "He didn't cut in while we were reporting to the junction tower. I have an idea that he had tapped the wire near the Electrical Building, and that his connection was destroyed."

"And perhaps his connection is not destroyed, but he has not been where he could hear the sounder?"

"If that is the case, we are liable to hear from him again," Bob replied.

They left the room and journeyed to the roof once more, and there they looked over the dead city. There was not a trace of smoke in any direction, not a human being, nothing to indicate the quarter from whence came the great power which had destroyed the Electrical Building.

Bob laughed as he saw Fred get behind a chimney.

"No use to try to hide," he said. "You may be getting directly in his line of vision instead of away from it. I don't think I am a coward; but when I fight I like to see my foe, or at least know where he is."

"We'd better go back then," Fred replied. "We ought not to take chances; for, if he does locate us, he's liable to end our days on earth."

So they descended to the ground floor again and went to the little rear room. The sounder was ticking frantically. Bob rushed across the room and answered.

"Anything else happened?" the junction tower asked.

"Nothing else," Bob replied.

"Let us know immediately if other property is destroyed."

"I'll do it."

"Arrange with Haverson so that one of you can answer our call every hour, day and night."

"We'll arrange it," Bob replied.

The wire was "broken," and there was a silence for a moment. Then the dots and dashes began again, but they were coming from the dreaded unknown instead of from the junction tower.

"I see you escaped destruction," the unknown said. "You must have witnessed my work, however. Have you nerve enough to remain in the city after seeing that?"

"We're still here, old man," answered Bob.

"I warned you to leave before noon, and you did not. Therefore, you must take the consequences. If you start at once, you may be able to get out of the city safely; but if you delay another

hour, you'll never reach the outside alive. Before midnight, you'll sleep in a sepulcher of ruins."

"We are not leaving," Bob replied.

"So be it," came the answer. "You have bravery, but not brains. You cannot hide from me. Will you leave the city?"

"Why do you wish us to leave?" Bob asked.

"Because it does not suit my purpose to have you remain."

"What is your purpose?"

"You ask too much," wired the unknown.

"If you are master of the world, and have the city and us at your mercy, why should you be afraid to tell us your purpose?"

"I am not afraid to tell you. But I refuse to do it."

"I say you are afraid. You do not have confidence in the power you say you possess."

"Have I not?" came the answer.

"Very well, I'll tell you my purpose, and in telling you I speak your death-warrant. For if I speak, you shall never leave the city alive."

"Speak!" commanded Bob.

"You talk for yourself. How about the other operator?"

Bob turned and looked at Haverson. Fred's face went white, but he stumbled forward, grasped the key, and tapped his answer:

"Speak!"

The unknown wired again:

"Very well! My purpose is to crush the city of Merton, to leave it a mass of ruins, to demolish every building, to tear stone from stone and brick from brick, and then to sweep it with consuming fire. The city is in my power now. Nothing can save it. Nothing can cheat me of my vengeance."

"You are not, then, going to loot the city of its wealth, and escape with it?" Bob asked.

"I do not care for wealth. I have possessed wealth for years—wealth I inherited and wealth that I amassed. It has brought me many things, chief among which is my revenge. I shall destroy the city—all of it except the building in which I now am—and then I shall go my way."

"You forget," said Bob, "that you are writing your own doom. The city is surrounded by thousands of people, and by troops. You may destroy it, but you'll never reach the outside. How will you escape the vengeance of the citizens outside?"

"The same force which tears the city to pieces shall be thrown against the foolish people who would oppose me," the unknown answered. "Though thousands stand in my way, they shall be swept from the face of the earth, hurled from my path. He who tries to oppose me, dies. Now you have learned my purpose—and for this knowledge you pay with your lives."

"One moment," Bob flashed. "Who are you, and why do you desire revenge against the city of Merton?"

"I'll tell you no more," said the unknown operator. "You have one hour in which to communicate with the outside. I grant you this last favor. At the end of the hour, the destruction of the city will begin. You may think it peculiar I did not crush the city while its thousands of people were within. Do you wish to know why?"

"Yes," Bob answered.

"Because I know what lingering agony is. I know the mercy in a quick death. I know the feelings of the people of Merton now upon the outside, who count the seconds while their homes and fortunes are being swept away. I want to send those thousands of people out into the world penniless, to make them lifelong slaves to the terrible memory of how it happened. In that way, my revenge will live long."

"To annihilate them would be merciful indeed. To hear their groans and shrieks, to see their tears and their agony—that will be sweet for me. I am done with talk. You have your hour—and perhaps you'll count the minutes and the seconds, and know what fear is when you see buildings tumbling about you, and flames shooting toward the sky. This is my last communication—I will cut the wire."

Bob had fallen back in the chair as the unknown sent the dots and dashes flying into the sounder. Fred was beside him, his hands trembling, his breath coming in gasps.

In all the room—in all the city, as far as they knew—there was no sound save that of the dots and dashes—that merciless ticking which announced the doom of the city, and of the two men within its limits.

But as the unknown destroyer concluded, and threatened to cut the wire, Bob's hand reached for the key again.

"Wa—" he began.

Then he sat back and groaned. The wire was cut!

There was now no means of communication left with the people of the outside!

And there, above the silent sounder, in the little back room of the jewelry-store, a small clock ticked away the seconds, and narrowed the gap between life and death.

(To be continued.)

JACOBI'S JUGGERNAUT.

By J. F. VALENTINE.

The strange night experience that befell a restaurant proprietor as he motored to his country home for his health.

"NOT the pleasantest kind of a night for an automobile ride, Harris," Jacobi remarked, as he settled back in the rear seat of the big car. "Particularly when one is taking it for his health."

"It might be better," his chauffeur ventured, as the car glided ahead in response to his pressure of a lever.

"We'll not stay out any longer than necessary," the employer declared. "When we reach the city limits, let the car out—I am tired, and want to get home."

"Yes, sir," was the response of the man at the wheel.

He was gazing intently ahead through the midnight mist that blanketed the streets of New York like a heavy fog.

Jacobi pulled closer around himself the fur robes—the drizzle of rain which entered the hooded car brought with it a chill that was of no benefit to one under the steady care of a physician, as he was.

The restaurant which bore his name—it stood out in large, electric-lighted letters—was one of the most exclusive in the bright-light district of New York, and for a generation had been under the personal management of the owner. But the steady application to business, with its long hours, had undermined Jacobi's health, and, in accordance with his doctor's orders, he had shifted his

residence to Haledon, a suburb fifteen miles up the Hudson.

With this move came a change in his business rules—he came to the city late in the afternoon, and left for his home about midnight, and as his physician directed that he be out in the air as much as possible, he had purchased an automobile, and used this means of transit to and from his home.

The car glided steadily through the gloom, and a glance without showed Jacobi that they were nearing the outskirts of the city.

"Let her out now," he directed, and the chauffeur shot the machine ahead.

In a few moments the houses had been left behind entirely, and they were now rushing through the open country with only the street-lights blinking through the mist like so many fireflies.

Now they were descending a slight grade, at the foot of which the driver knew there was an abrupt turn, and, although he slowed down a trifle, the car skidded on the wet highway as it took the curve.

Suddenly Harris emitted a cry of alarm, and threw on the brakes. At the same instant the heavy car bounded over an obstruction in the road and came to a halt about fifty feet beyond.

Before Jacobi could question, the chauffeur burst out: "A man—we ran over him. The road—was too narrow to turn out."

The restaurant-owner sprang to his feet.

"Are you sure?" he queried.

The driver turned and nodded his head—he was too frightened to speak.

Jacobi shook his shoulder.

"Then come—we must help him."

His employer's words brought the man back to his senses, and, jumping from the car, he quickly unfastened one of the large lamps from the front and hurried back to where the accident had happened. Jacobi followed closely at his heels.

As the two men neared the spot, the lamp's rays showed only too plainly the truth of the chauffeur's words. There before them, in the middle of the roadway, lay the prostrate form of a man.

For an instant Harris paused, and as his employer came abreast of him, he cried: "If I have killed him—I'll never run a machine again!"

Jacobi seized his arm and literally pulled him to the side of the injured man, whom he bent over and examined critically, while the chauffeur hung back, fearful of the worst.

"He's not dead," Jacobi declared in an undertone. "Hurry to the car, and back it up carefully. Then we'll rush to the nearest doctor."

"You think he'll live?" Harris queried anxiously. "You don't think he'll die?"

"I do not know," was the curt response. "Bring the car here."

The other ran swiftly to do as bidden, and springing into the front seat, reversed the gears, and the big machine slowly backed toward the man whose head rested on Jacobi's knee. When it stopped, Harris leaped to the ground, ready to assist.

"Help me get him into the car," Jacobi directed, and, raising the unconscious man between them, the two lifted him tenderly into the automobile.

"He must be intoxicated," Harris muttered as he helped make the stranger as comfortable as possible.

"Not at all," Jacobi broke in quickly. "That is just what I thought at first, but there is no trace of liquor in his breath. I cannot understand it; but go ahead now."

At that instant the injured man

roused up, and, after a deep groan, burst out: "Don't strike me again!"

Then he suddenly sat erect and grabbed at Jacobi.

"Here, Harris, help me," the restaurant-owner called as the chauffeur was about to replace the lamp. Then he attempted to pacify the stranger. "There, my man, we are your friends, and want to take you to a doctor."

The other's hands dropped limply to his sides, and in the dim glimmer of the street-lamp, Jacobi could see he was staring directly at him.

"You are injured," he continued soothingly; "but I will get medical aid as quickly as possible. My driver did not see you in the darkness, and ran over you; but I hope and pray you are not hurt seriously."

The other sank back upon the cushions.

"I remember all now," he said, almost under his breath. "Are you a restaurant-owner?"

This question took Jacobi by surprise, but he replied: "Yes—why?"

"Then you are the man they wanted."

This puzzled the other more than ever, and, leaning closer to catch the almost inaudible statements of the injured man, he said: "I do not understand."

"I know now," was the response; "they wanted you—and got me."

Jacobi realized the futility of securing any information from the man, whose mind he now believed to be wandering. Leaning out of the car toward Harris, who stood alongside, he ordered: "Go ahead, but drive carefully, avoiding any jar. I'll take him to my home."

"No, not that," the stranger burst out. "Take me to my home."

The car was already under way, and the driver leaned back to catch any direction he might give.

"And where is that?" Jacobi inquired.

"Beaumont—on this same road."

"Better let me take you to my house," the restaurant proprietor urged. "I live in Haledon—only two miles farther than Beaumont. Then I'll summon my own doctor—"

"No, I want mine," the stranger in-

terrupted. "I'll tell you when we get there."

A sharp cry escaped him.

"Oh," he moaned, "my head and side pain me so."

For a minute no one spoke, then the injured one added: "You must be the man they were after."

"What do you mean?" Jacobi asked.

The car was slowly proceeding northward, and an occasional darkened house disclosed the fact that they were approaching a town.

"I can tell you—in a few words."

The stranger spoke with great effort. "I had spent the evening—at a friend's—about three miles down the road. The last trolley—was missed—and I was forced to walk. That spot—where you found me—I approached and heard voices. I stopped—and listened— Oh, my side!" he moaned, and paused as if in great pain.

"I'll have you at a doctor's pretty soon now," Jacobi told him.

"There were three men," the stranger continued. "I soon learned they were there—to hold-up and rob—a restaurant-owner in New York—who lived in Haledon.

"Yes?" Jacobi broke in, now all excitement.

"Just then—I stepped on a dry twig. Before I knew it—they were upon me—and struck me down by repeated blows on the head. I remember nothing more—until I found myself here."

"Then you saved me—" Jacobi stopped abruptly, and there was an added warmth in his tone as he continued: "Try to bear the pain a short while longer."

The stranger leaned forward and stared into the gloom outside the car.

"My house—you are near it. It's on the next corner," he murmured.

"If you wish to be taken there," Jacobi rejoined, "I will leave you. But I insist upon sending a doctor to you."

"There is one in our house," the stranger returned, still gazing intently out of the car. "It's a boarding-house—and—there it is now."

He pointed to a large dwelling a short distance ahead.

"Pull in, Harris," was the order, and the car drew up close to the curb.

"What is your name?" Jacobi inquired, as the machine came to a standstill.

"Bickel," was the reply.

"Ring the bell, Harris, and get some one out here."

As the chauffeur started for the stoop the injured man called after him: "Ask them to get Dr. Zabriskie to come down. Ask for him."

It was some moments after Harris had rung the bell when a light appeared in a room on the second floor and the raised window disclosed a woman.

"Who is there?" she inquired.

"Please tell Dr. Zabriskie to come down," Jacobi called. "Mr. Bickel has met with an accident—"

The head quickly disappeared, and a moment later a man in a dressing-gown and slippers appeared at the front door. He volunteered the information that he was Dr. Zabriskie.

In response to Jacobi's call, he followed Harris to the machine and, upon being told very briefly of the accident, directed that the injured man be helped to his room.

The chauffeur and his employer made a seat by grasping the crossed hands of each other, and carried the sufferer into the house and up-stairs, the doctor following them closely.

As the victim of the highwaymen was laid tenderly upon his bed, Jacobi and Harris stepped back to allow the physician to determine the extent of Bickel's injuries.

"What happened, Mr. Bickel?" the surgeon queried while taking his pulse.

"I was struck on the head," was the reply, "and then run over—by an automobile."

"Where do you feel pain?" the doctor went on, while he felt the other's head carefully.

"My head—and side," was the groaning reply.

Zabriskie unbuttoned the man's coat and shirt, and went over Bickel's chest with both hands, while Jacobi and his chauffeur awaited anxiously the result of the examination.

"Three ribs fractured—one compound," the surgeon announced without looking up. "And a bad one, too," he added in a tone that plainly showed the

seriousness of the accident. "It may have punctured the lung, although I am not certain."

"And his head?" Jacobi queried earnestly.

"Can't tell yet whether his skull is fractured or not."

"This is a very serious matter, doctor," Jacobi ventured after some hesitation; "and I feel doubly responsible for Mr. Bickel's condition. In the first place, his getting what was intended for me may have saved my life, and, in the second place, his broken ribs were caused by my machine passing over him. I owe him a debt I can never repay, and as you seem to be a friend of his, I implore you to give him every attention in your power. I am responsible for the bill, and, if necessary, do not leave his side for an instant. Here is a hundred dollars on account."

He handed the other some bills which he had taken from his pocket.

"I will do all in my power," the doctor declared with emphasis, "and thank you for your confidence in me, and for these."

He nodded toward the bills, which he slipped into a wallet.

"Bickel and I are the best of friends, and I tell you this'll be a blow to him."

"It would be a blow to any one," Jacobi returned.

"But particularly to him," the doctor said. "He has been out of work for some time, and was promised a position for next Monday. I fear it will be a great many Mondays before he can think of going to business."

The restaurant-owner drew the physician to the far side of the room, where they held a brief whispered conversation, at the conclusion of which the two men approached the bed again.

"Mr. Bickel," Jacobi began, "perhaps you do not realize just what you have done for me to-night. Had it not been for you, I might be in the same condition as yourself—or, more likely, in a much worse one. And as the doctor has just informed me, you will be unable, just now, to accept the position that is offered to you. I wish to make you a present—"

The man on the bed raised his hand in silent protest.

"But I insist upon it," Jacobi continued. "I have already assured Dr. Zabriskie that all his charges will be paid by me, and I have advanced him one hundred dollars on account. But now, for yourself."

He drew out his check-book and, hastily filling one out, handed it to the injured man. "This is a slight token of my gratitude to you," he added.

Bickel took it in a dazed sort of way, and glanced at the slip of paper quickly.

"I can't accept this," he said slowly, and let it flutter to the floor.

The physician drew the restaurant owner from the bedside again.

"I will attend to it, Mr. Jacobi," he said, "and it will be a godsend to him. Knowing him as I do, I am fully aware of his financial condition; and a few dollars will tide him over for the present, or at least until he is able to be around again. Landladies are like the tide," he added smilingly, "they wait for no man."

He stepped to the side of the bed and picked up the check.

"Five thousand dollars!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fastened upon the bit of paper. "Why, it's a small fortune to him."

"And he deserves it," Jacobi declared. "I will leave the patient in your care. It is late—why, it's nearly two o'clock—so I must go. Spare no expense or trouble to effect a speedy recovery. I will drop in to-morrow, to inquire regarding his progress."

With a parting "Good night," Jacobi hurried from the room, and down the stairs to the street, where Harris, having realized some time before that his presence was not needed in the sick-room, was waiting.

"It's pretty tough on the poor fellow," Jacobi murmured, as the car again proceeded on its way to Haledon.

"But he'll recover, won't he?" the chauffeur inquired.

"I think so—or, at least, I hope so," was the reply. "He seemed quite himself again, although suffering acute pain. Let us hope for the best, anyway; but I think, Harris, that you and I had a pretty close call."

The chauffeur made no reply, and

the ride continued in silence, soon ending, as the heavy car ground noisily over the pebbled driveway that led from the highway to Jacobi's house.

He dismissed the chauffeur and hurried to his rooms, where he retired for the night, hoping for the rest he needed. But the events of the last few hours weighed heavily upon him, and sleep would not come.

The very fact that he would fear to take the rides his doctor had ordered preyed upon his mind, and at last forced him to a decision—he would not let the matter rest where it was, but would employ detectives to trace the highway-men and bring them to justice.

With this decision came a determination to lose no time in acting upon it. He resolved to start upon the work at daylight, while such clues as there might be would still be warm.

Jacobi glanced at his watch—it lacked five minutes of five.

"By Jove, I'll phone Hart now—he can be up here in an hour or so, and I'll get him on the case immediately."

He had had occasion to employ a detective on two or three occasions, and, being recommended to one named Hart, had found him very satisfactory. Consequently, this man came to his mind, and he quickly determined to get in communication with him, knowing he had a telephone in his residence.

Jacobi threw about himself a dressing-gown, and descended to the library, where the telephone was located. Some moments elapsed between the time he gave the desired number to the operator and the thick inquiry at the other end: "Well, what do you want?"

But, although his voice betrayed the fact that its owner had been suddenly awakened by the ringing of the telephone bell, Jacobi recognized it as belonging to the man he wanted.

"This is Mr. Jacobi," he said. "I am in Haledon, and wish you would come here as quickly as possible."

The other was instantly alert, and ready to do as bidden.

He arrived in Haledon in due course. Jacobi met him at the station with the car, and the restaurant proprietor hurriedly recited the events of the past night, the detective listening intently.

"Thinking the place for clues would naturally be the spot where the affair happened," Jacobi added, "I came down to take you there."

"It seems a peculiar case," the detective replied. "But let us start for the spot; my work begins there."

"Yes, go ahead, Harris," Jacobi directed. "Do you think you can locate the exact place?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, as the car moved off.

Hart inquired into every detail, from the time of the accident until Jacobi had left the bedside of the injured man.

"As far as I can make out at present, Mr. Jacobi," he said slowly, "you have had a very narrow escape."

"So I reasoned," the other agreed.

Hart then turned his attention to the chauffeur.

"Stop just this side of the spot, if you can remember the exact location. There may be some clue that might be destroyed if we ran over the spot."

"It is just ahead there—where the road turns sharply," Harris explained.

"Then, stop here," Hart directed. "Fortunately, the drizzle of last night was not heavy enough to destroy footprints, if there were any left in the soft dirt. Let us get out here and walk carefully. Keep a sharp lookout."

The three men alighted from the car, and slowly made their way to the spot indicated by the chauffeur, easily recognizable by the footprints in the soft dirt.

Hart stared hard at these for some seconds, then remarked: "There are plenty of tracks here; but, as they do not lead into the bushes at the side, I judge they are your own. As near as I can make out, the highwaymen must have kept in the hard road when they left this spot—there are no signs that they made their escape by cutting across country. Not right here, at any rate. You passed no one on the road, did you?"

"Not that I noticed," Jacobi replied. "Did you, Harris?"

"No, sir."

Suddenly Hart's eyes fastened upon something about ten feet from where they stood, and he hurried in that direction.

"What's this?" he queried, as the other two men followed behind him.

There, in the soft soil, were two parallel marks, as if something heavy had been dragged toward the bushes at the side of the road.

Hart followed the strange marks, and stepped into the wet bush where they disappeared, the others watching him closely. He stooped down for a few moments, then raised his head and beckoned.

As Jacobi neared his side, he pointed to an object half hidden by the undergrowth; and that gentleman gave a start of surprise, as he saw before him what appeared at first glance to be the body of a man.

The detective noted his look, and reassured him.

"No need to be shocked—it's only a dummy," he said.

The restaurant owner leaned over, and peered closer at the thing; and, when he saw it was only some straw-filled clothing, he queried blankly: "What does this mean?"

"I have my own theory," Hart replied vaguely. "Perhaps I am wrong; but my advice is to take me to the injured man as quickly as possible."

"But what is your theory?"

Whether it was that the detective did not consider his theory had secure enough foundation, he was not ready to communicate to his employer, but replied simply: "Take me to the man; but do not introduce me as a detective."

"But we cannot call upon a sick man at this hour," the other protested.

"Yes, we can, under these circumstances," Hart insisted.

"Very well; the case is in your hands," but Jacobi's tone showed plainly his reluctance to follow the advice.

The three men returned to the car, and were soon on their way to Beaumont and the injured man.

"What can I say; and who are you supposed to be?" Jacobi inquired.

"And perhaps the man will be asleep—"

"In that case, his rest will be disturbed," Hart interrupted.

"I cannot do that, after what has happened."

"And it is for just that reason that you will do it. When I tell you—"

"Here is the house," Jacobi interrupted, as the car came to a halt.

"Then let us go up immediately."

There was a positiveness in the detective's tone that brooked no objection; and reluctantly Jacobi followed him up the steps.

In answer to his ring of the bell, a domestic came to the door.

"Is Mr. —" he began, then turned to the restaurant owner. "What is his name?"

"Bickel."

"Yes; is Mr. Bickel in?"

"Yes, sir; because I heard him in his room as I came by it a few moments ago."

"I guess it was Dr. Zabriskie," Jacobi broke in. "He probably stayed up with him all night."

"Probably," Hart repeated quietly. Then, addressing the girl, he directed: "Take us to his room. Do not announce us—take us right up."

The two men trailed after the maid, and paused before the door she indicated. Without a word, Hart turned the knob quickly and threw open the door.

"I beg your pardon; I guess I got in the wrong room," he said to the men whose backs were turned to him, and who were busily packing a grip.

At the sound of his voice they faced about suddenly, to see before them a stranger and the restaurant owner. The countenances of each took on a peculiar expression, as they stood there, apparently too surprised to move or speak.

Hart crossed the threshold, and, without taking his eyes from the two men, inquired of Jacobi: "Which is the injured man?"

"That—one!" was the reply, which came with a gasp of astonishment between each word.

"Pretty well looking man to have been knocked senseless by highwaymen, and then run over by an automobile, I should say," Hart remarked.

"But—but—" Bickel began.

"There are no 'buts' about it," Hart broke in. "I see through your game."

"Mr. Hart," Jacobi burst out, "I protest."

"The case is in my hands now, sir," the detective declared firmly. Turning to the two men, he continued, as he dis-

closed his shield: "I am a detective, and I want you."

"This matter has gone too far," Jacobi cried. "Mr. Bickel, I assure you—"

"Let me talk," Hart interrupted. "Can't you see their game?"

Dr. Zabriskie fumbled in his pocket, and drew out the check which the restaurant owner had presented to the injured man; and his hand trembled as he grimly held it out toward the detective.

"Take it—we are leaving town by the first train."

Hart took the piece of paper.

"When you leave town you come with me," he announced firmly. "Will you prosecute them, Mr. Jacobi?"

"I cannot see—"

"Why, you didn't run over this man," the other said impatiently. "It was a dummy, which he dragged into the bushes when he saw you stop, and then lay down in the road himself. There were no highwaymen waiting for you, either. It was all in the game, and they knew that you'd fall for it. Any one in the same position would naturally do so."

A light of understanding broke over Jacobi's face.

"I can't believe it."

"But I can; and this Dr. Zabriskie is no more a doctor than I am. He was the other man in the affair. Will you prosecute now?"

A smile of relief broke over Jacobi's countenance as he replied: "No; I am too delighted to know that I have not injured a man who was supposedly the cause of saving my life. No, I'll not prosecute, now that I have the check back."

Hart gave vent to a grunt of disgust.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he muttered.

Then he turned to the two men.

"Come on now, and we'll see that you get out of town. Pay your bill—"

"We did that a few moments ago," Bickel said, as he shot a furtive glance at the man he had attempted to defraud.

"Then, come on—we'll take you to the station," Hart added.

The four men descended to the waiting auto; and Harris's surprise was noticeable, as he saw them enter the machine.

"To the station," Jacobi ordered.

Not a word was spoken during the short ride; and there was no parting greeting as the two strangers clambered out at the railroad-depot and stood on the platform, awaiting the train.

"You ought to send them up," Hart declared, as he lingered beside the car. "By Jove; how about the hundred you thought you were paying to a doctor. I'll get that, too."

But Jacobi detained him.

"No; let them keep it. It's worth that to have my mind relieved—to know my machine did not break four or five of a man's ribs."

A heavy train was rumbling into the station, and Hart started toward it with the pair in front of him.

"I'll see them to New York, anyway. Good day, sir."

Harris turned to his employer.

"What does it mean, sir?"

Jacobi smiled grimly.

"Nothing much, except that you didn't run over that man Bickel. Relieve your mind on that score. Take me home now, and I'll tell you all about it on the way to New York this afternoon."

FAITHFULNESS.

THEY vowed eternal constancy—

The youth and maiden shy;

Through time and through eternity

Their love should never die.

But fate, in life's uncertain whirl,

Played havoc with their plan—

He's married to another girl,

She to another man.

THE CRIMSON HARVEST.

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "From Flag to Flag," "On Glory's Trail," "With Sealed Lips," etc.

A story of Paris in the Reign of Terror, with an American for its central figure and his sweetheart in the grip of powerful foes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ACCOMPANIED by Shadrach Bemis, an old ex-scout and trapper, a young American, Jack Braith, sets sail for France with the purpose of claiming the title and estates of his late granduncle, the Vicomte de Chevreuse. He knows nothing of his French relatives except of his cousin, Etienne de Chevreuse, a wild youth who is said to resemble him greatly in looks. On the voyage he meets and falls in love with Mlle. Elise de Périer, who, with her father, is taken aboard from a sloop wrecked by a privateer after a narrow escape from being kidnapped by the privateer's mysterious captain.

Arrived in Paris, where the Revolution is raging, Braith, Bemis, and De Périer take lodging at a small hotel in the Rue St. Honoré. Two weeks later Mlle. de Périer is abducted by some unknown enemy; but Bemis succeeds in tracking the cab in which she is carried off to a convent in the suburbs. Under the guidance of Bemis, Braith goes to the place and demands to see the abbess. Her words of greeting leave him dumfounded with amazement.

CHAPTER VI (Continued).

A NEW MYSTERY.

WHAT the abbess said that so annoyed me was merely this:

"Citizen Braith."

How did she know my name?

I peered forward through the half-light to scan her pallid face. Indistinctly as I could see it, I was none, the less sure I had never before looked upon her.

"Citizen Braith," she repeated, as I did not speak, "you wished to speak with me?"

"Yes," I made shift to reply, pulling myself together, and blurting out my message awkwardly enough. "I wished to see you about Mlle. de Périer."

She inclined her head, but with no surprise.

"Mlle. de Périer is here?" I went on.

"Certainly, Citizeness Périer is here," she answered, apparently astonished at my question.

"Mother," I pleaded, awkward in my hopeless eagerness, "I have come for her. Won't you let me take her away? I beg it of you. Her old father—"

"Let you take her away?" echoed the abbess.

"Yes. Back to her father. Mother, I do not ask why she—"

"But, citizen," she interrupted, "it is not necessary to entreat. Your order is sufficient. As you well know, the citizeness has been detained here only subject to your wishes. Now that you are ready to remove her, there can be no obstacle to her departure. I hardly expected you so soon. But—"

I did not hear the rest of the sentence. The room seemed to whirl around me.

Was I dreaming? Here I had come, prepared to beg, threaten, intrigue. Yet I had hoped little of my quest. And at my first word I found the door of my wishes flung wide open.

Surely, of all the day's many tangles, this was the most mystifying.

My first thought was that in the gloom the abbess had mistaken me for another. But no. She had called me by name, had said Elise was at the convent awaiting only my word of release. Mad and impossible as it all seemed, I was not idiot enough to spoil my advantage by prying into its reason.

"I thank you, mother," I said, as coolly as I could. "And if I may trouble you to have Mlle. de Périer ready at once, I

* Began April ARGOZY. Single copies, 10 cents.

will have a carriage sent for to take her away."

The abess bowed, and was about to quit the room when I interposed:

"One moment. May I ask that you do not let her know it is I who arranged her release?"

"But—"

"Let her think it is the police, or any one you will," I insisted. "But I do not wish my name to appear. The carriage, if I can find one at this hour, will be awaiting her in the courtyard in ten minutes. Will you see that she is ready by that time?"

Coming upon the little boy, on the steps, I handed him a gold coin and bade him hurry off to the nearest mews for two *fiacres*, and have them sent to the convent with all speed. Then I joined Bemis at the gate.

To the old trapper I told the story. At its end he muttered confusedly:

"This ain't a joke, is it?"

"I don't know," said I. "My only fear is that I may wake up before we get to Mlle. de Périer's home."

"But what are the *two* carriages for?" he queried, as the cabs rumbled up to the gate.

"I want her love," I replied; "not her gratitude. If she knows I have saved her from this place she may think she owes me something. You and I will get into this second cab. The abess will put her in the first. I will give directions beforehand to both drivers. One to go straight to our hotel with her; the other—the one you and I take—to follow close to guard her.

"She need never know. I don't care to pose as a rescuer, especially after such a tame rescue as this; nor to have her feel indebted to me. She must care for me for *myself*. Not for what I've done for her."

Which proved to be the most insane plan of my life, and one that was to lead us all far closer to death than most men are brought before their last hour.

CHAPTER VII.

DISMAY.

IT was late next morning when I awoke. And long I lay drowsily won-

dering why I felt so at peace with the world. Then I remembered. Elise was safe!

True to my plan, Bemis and I had not made known our presence. Elise had entered the cab in the convent courtyard, and had been driven straight to the hotel, we following in the second vehicle.

I had seen her alight and hurry into the hotel, and had noted in that brief glimpse the stricken, harassed look on her sweet face. Small wonder, after all she had been through.

I had not broken in upon her meeting with her father. She would be weary. It was no time to intrude. So I waited.

And now at dawn I awoke. Across the room Shadrach was snoring mightily. In the street outside I heard the rolling of carts. A shrill newsboy's voice cut the air with words whose frequency of utterance had well-nigh robbed them of their gruesome meaning:

"List of the Condemned! List of the Condemned!"

For thus it was that the news-sheets of the time made known to the public the results of each previous day's trials. And people read with bated breath.

None could say how soon his or her own name might be emblazoned there, nor when the cockaded guard of the Committee of Public Safety might halt at the door with the dread summons:

"In the name of the Republic of France!"

That morning I called on Laurier, the Chevreuse advocate. He had returned from Touraine the preceding afternoon. But I got slight benefit from the visit. Old Laurier declared himself utterly at a loss.

"For months I have been at work on the case," he said in doleful perplexity. "It seemed moderately simple at first. Indeed, I cannot say why it has not remained so. But at every turn some new and unforeseen obstacle blocks my way. Some legal quibble due to the changed conditions, or else a setback of a clerical sort. It seems as if some wily foe were working in the dark against us."

"You spoke in your letter," I suggested, "of another claimant, who had vowed to fight my claim to the last ditch. Can you tell me who he is, and where I may find him? I may as well

settle with him soon as late. If there is a duel to be fought—"

"I am not yet at liberty to give you the information you ask," he interposed. "You see, I am the lawyer of the estate; not your personal advocate. So I must do justice alike to all legal claimants. Personally, as I wrote you, I believe your claim just, and yourself the natural successor. But, until I can fully establish those facts and hear in full the pretensions of—"

"I understand," I broke in, rising.

I knew well the dreary, long-winded technicalities of French law. It could not be hurried.

"Moreover," he added, "even though you are proven the rightful wearer of the title 'Vicomte de Chevreuse,' it will not only be an empty honor in these days of equality, but may even implicate you as an aristocrat. I speak unprofessionally, of course," he finished nervously. "You see, I—"

"I know," said I, "yet I am minded to claim the title. For myself, it means nothing. I am an American, born and bred; and to America I shall return, when this business is at an end. Yet," thinking of Elise and her father, "I wish to prove my right to the title, none the less. As for the estates and the money, I shall need those for the same cause. I beg you will use all diligence in my behalf."

When I reached the outer office, where Shadrach was awaiting me, I found him doubled up on a high stool, poring over a shabby little book, his lips moving noiselessly, his forehead puckered. It was not the first time I had caught him thus engaged. Now, as always before, at sight of me he thrust the book into his deerskin blouse.

But he saw that I had noted his action. As we passed out into the street, he cleared his throat, and remarked, with some nervousness:

"Know what I was doin'?"

"No," I answered. "What?"

Instead of replying directly, he drew a long breath, and then burst forth into a jumble of fearsome sounds.

"Thar!" he ended, with sheepish pride. "How's that?"

"Is it a Choctaw war-whoop?" I asked, "or—"

"It's *French!*" he retorted, deeply offended. "An' you pretend to know the language, an' can't even understand it! What I said was French for 'Have you the pen, ink, an' paper of your gran'ther's wife?'"

"Oho! It was a French text-book you were studying? Good for you! Now say the sentence again, a little slower this time. French people don't talk quite so explosively."

"*Avvy-zoo-lay-ploom,—l—*" he began pompously. Then, with a rueful sigh: "The whole measly thing's slipped me ag'in! But I'll git it some time or other. When you goin' to call on Miss Elise?"

I consulted my watch.

"It is nearly noon," I answered.

"I'll go as soon as we reach the hotel."

"You were silly not to take her home from that convent place last night. She'd likely 'a' squealed 'I'm your'n!' the minute she clapped eyes on you, an' found it was you that let her out of the convent."

"I've told you once that I want her love, not her thanks," I replied.

"And—"

"An' I've told you twice you're foolish. Trouble's li'ble to come from that breed of nonsense."

I laughed at him, and ran up the broad stairs of the hotel to the door of the De Périer suite. To the answering "*Entrez!*" I swung open the door and entered the spacious old drawing-room.

Elise and her father were seated near the window, deep in talk. A glance showed me that Elise had been weeping. On her white face I read, too, that harassed, almost heart-broken look which had so distressed me the night before.

At sight of me, both father and daughter sprang to their feet. I hurried forward eagerly, then halted. For, instead of the welcoming smile I had looked to see, De Périer's pale old eyes were ablaze with wrath. Elise had shrunk back at my advance, as though I had struck her.

And thus, for an instant, we three stood. It was De Périer who broke the silence.

"It is well you have come, *monsieur*," he said, in a voice shaking with rage, "though I scarce expected such effront-

ery. It is a peace, however, with the rest of your conduct."

"M. de Périer!" I cried, doubting my own ears.

"It is well!" he repeated. "For you can hear from our own lips how we regard such as you. If—"

"*Mademoiselle!*" I exclaimed aghast, turning to Elise, "has your father gone mad?"

But she vouchsafed me no answer. Her gentle eyes were full of a cold scorn that had no place therein. Yet, behind it, I seemed to read a sorrow greater than her outward contempt.

I drew myself together, facing De Périer again.

"Will you do me the honor to explain, sir?" I asked stiffly.

"Hypocrisy will not help you now," he retorted. "We know everything. I only grieve we did not know sooner."

"What do you mean? On my soul, this is Greek to me."

"I mean," snarled De Périer, "if I were a younger man, I should kill you, as I would kill a cur. As it is, leave our rooms before I forget my own dignity. Another will soon be here who will know how to deal with you. Though it were unbecoming a gentleman of France to soil his hands on such *canaille*."

Elise had crossed to where the shaking, furious old man stood, and laid an appealing hand on his arm. The touch momentarily calmed him.

"Go!" he repeated, pointing again to the door.

In reply, I folded my arms, and stood stock-still.

"I shall not go," said I as quietly as might be, "until this absurd misunderstanding is cleared up."

"Misunderstanding!" he mocked bitterly. "The 'misunderstanding' has been all ours, *monsieur*. It no longer exists. Nor do you, so far as concerns us."

"*Mademoiselle*," said I, again ignoring him, "I seem unable to obtain any explanation from your father. Will you do me the honor to tell me what this all means?"

"I forbid you to address my daughter!" quavered the irate De Périer.

"I have been honored by your acquaintance, *mademoiselle*. and by your

father's," I went on, unheeding. "To the best of my knowledge, I have done nothing to forfeit that honor. Yet to-day—"

Elise checked again an outbreak of De Périer's rage. Speaking with an effort, yet in a curiously dead, calm voice, she turned to her father.

"It would be better to end this. I cannot but be painful to us all. Tell M. Braith why we forbid him our rooms, father, as briefly as you can."

"M. Braith," said the old man, quieter now, and bowing acquiescence to his daughter's request, "I welcomed your acquaintance because I believed you a gentleman. I allowed you to meet and converse freely with my daughter, under the same impression. How have you requited us? By causing my daughter's arrest as a political suspect. By having her spirited away from me, and placed in the convent of Our Lady of Montmartre. By—"

"It is a lie!" I shouted, forgetting in my amaze to choose more respectful language toward a man so much my senior. "Who tells so dastardly a falsehood of me? It is absurd, as well as false. I—"

"Your acting is excellent, *monsieur*," sneered De Périer, "but it will not serve. You know best why you did this thing. At first, I myself was at a loss for a motive to it. But this very day the clue has unexpectedly come into my hands. I understand now only too well why you should wish my daughter out of the way. Have you heard enough? If so, go!"

"I have heard no word of truth," I replied, dizzy with the whole bewildering affair, "nor anything I can understand. You are actually mad enough to claim it was I who had Mlle. de Périer kidnapped? I demand to know your authority for so ridiculous a—"

"I am his authority," interposed Elise. "You?"

"I went to the *fiacre* to meet my father: I was hurried into it, and the driver started. Then I found it was not my father, but a strange man beside me on the seat. The curtains were down. I could not see his face. I was hurried to the convent. There, they were awaiting me.

"I was led to a cell by two lay-sisters. But no word of explanation was offered. Some hours later—long after dark—I was ordered to go to the abbess's room. The police had ordered me set free."

I remembered angrily the tale I had bade the abbess tell as explanation. Elise went on:

"As the abbess was telling me of my release, she was called from the room for a moment. On the table lay several open papers. One was a '*lettre de cachet*,' consigning me to the convent, 'on request of Citizen John Braith, American, and for such term as he shall designate.' It was signed by Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, and countersigned by the president of the—"

"My name? *Mine?*" I found voice to gasp.

"Your name," she repeated miserably. "I still did not believe. When the abbess returned, I showed her the paper, and demanded to know what it meant."

"And she—"

"She confirmed it. I still refused to believe. Then she showed me the signature 'John Braith, American,' at the bottom of my commitment, and—and described you accurately. She said you had been at the convent that very day."

Naturally enough, the abbess could describe me. She had, at the time, parted from me not ten minutes before. But, even at that, I could make nothing of it all.

Why should a daughter of the church lie about such a thing? No; she had told doubtless what she deemed the truth. Also, she had called me by name on first sight.

Oh, there was no getting to the bottom of the wretched complication! Nor had I just then the heart to try to solve it. All I wanted was to set myself straight in Elise's eyes.

"Well, sir," observed De Périér, "are you satisfied?"

"No!" I declared.

"You still persist in—"

"In declaring my innocence. I do not understand this mystery. But I give you my word—"

"The word of an American!"

There was a slur in the retort that maddened me.

"Yes, of an American!" I flashed

back. "Of a race that has yet to be charged with the petty dishonesties and lies that are dragging your Old-World nations to their fall. You use the term 'American' as an insult, *Sieur de Périér*. I wear it as an *honor*."

"An honor on which your country is doubtless to be complimented," he laughed contemptuously. "But this has little to do with the matter in hand. You have—"

"I have heard you patiently, and I deny the charges. All I ask is the chance to prove them false."

De Périér shrugged his shoulders in disgust, and once again pointed downward. But Elise now spoke. Her lovely face had softened. I knew she was loath to disbelieve me, and that my vehemence had had some slight effect on her heart.

"M. Braith," she said, "I would rather cut off my own hand than that you should have been thus treated if you do not deserve it. If that is so, both I and my father will make all the amends that mortals can. You must not blame us, nor think we decided overhastily. Surely, the proof stands clear. Can you refute it?"

"He can overwhelm us with lies!" cried De Périér, before I could speak. "If he has *real* proof, let him produce it."

"You have doubted my word, *mon-sieur*," said I. "Among gentlemen, a sacred word of honor is—"

"My father has doubted your word," admitted Elise, intervening between De Périér and myself, "but he was indignant at what he thought were my wrongs. When he is calmer, he will agree with me in accepting it. I do not ask for proofs, M. Braith. If you will give me your solemn word of honor—"

"Gladly!" I exclaimed, my heart throbbing with joy at her trust, and its triumph over such fearfully condemning appearances. "Most gladly! I—"

"Your word of honor," she continued, "that the abbess was mistaken in thinking you visited the convent and talked with her yesterday—"

My changed face must have warned her. For she stopped, and her own pale cheek grew whiter. Her big gray eyes were luminous with unspoken pleadings. What could I do?

Yes, I know it would have been the part of sanity to say: "I went there to save you." But, even if I could have made her believe the story of my strange interview with the abbess—which my own common sense scarce permitted me to believe—I was still all the more resolved not to come to her with an appeal for thanks, when what I craved was her unbiassed love.

And stubborn pride, too, flew to the aid of this resolve.

Her father had insulted me. She herself had at first doubted me—though her strongest reason for that doubt I was destined not to know until many months later—and, in face of all this, how could I pose melodramatically as her preserver? It was out of the question. And, at best, De Périer would never credit my version of the scene at the convent. No; there was no way out of it.

De Périer, who had moved to the window, as though disclaiming any share in his daughter's compassionate weakness, now looked around in some interest. He had noted Elise's pause, and, like her, read my face.

"You heard my daughter's question," he rasped. "Did you, or did you not, go to the convent of Our Lady of Montmartre yesterday?"

I made no reply.

"Did you talk there with the abbess, in reference to my daughter's captivity?"

I did not answer.

"Come, come, sir!" the old man growled. "A moment back, you were eager enough to be put upon your so-called 'word of honor.' Yet, now that we stoop to question you, you are dumb. Surely, there is not so much 'honor' in that same 'word' as to choke back all your speech? Can you find no lies to those two simple queries: Did you go to the convent, and did you talk to the abbess?"

"My answer to both questions," I returned hopelessly, "is—yes!"

A little gasp from Elise, and an ironic chuckle from her father. Then the girl sank down, and buried her face in her hands. There was that in her crushed attitude which went like a knife to my heart.

"I went there," I asserted again, "and I talked to the abbess. But it was not to—"

A jeering laugh from the old man cut me short.

"So the supply of falsehoods has not yet run out, after all!" he remarked. "Have you still others?"

"I have spoken the truth," I urged, casting sense to the winds, along with hope, "and any man with a brain should know it. What object could I have had in the kidnaping of your daughter? Let me tell you one more 'falsehood,' to prove what I say—or to clinch the rest. M. de Périer, I love your daughter. I had hoped to come to you, rich and titled, to claim her hand. Why should I, then, have spirited her away? I love her, and—"

The old man's sardonic humor gave place in a breath to senile fury at my presumption.

"Go!" he shrieked, springing unsteadily at me, cane aloft.

Down came the slender walking-stick, across my unguarded face. Feeble as was the arm that dealt it, the blow was none the less infuriating.

And then I did the bravest deed of my life. I looked De Périer in the eyes—scarce noting Elise's cry of horror, and her hurried rush between us—bowed in silence to both father and daughter, turned on my heel, and left the room.

My whole being throbbed and burned in accord with the sting of the welt across my face. I could not think, save through a mist of red.

I had been struck like a street-beggar—and in the presence of a woman! The woman I loved. I had been struck, and I had been brave enough not to resent it.

I left the hotel, looking not to right or left. Straight onward I went, heedless of distance, direction, or time.

Through deserted byways, and through busy throngs I hurried at unchecked pace. More than one man was rudely jostled in my unswerving progress through the more frequented thoroughfares.

At such times, I came out of my mad daze long enough to hope vaguely that one of the persons thus hustled might take umbrage and pick a quarrel with me.

An angry man is not unlike a child. A man furious as I, and, at the same time, so sorely perplexed and heart-broken, is perhaps little better than an imbecile. And always that reddening welt on my face burned and stung. It seemed to me that the mark must blaze out from my countenance and give notice to all:

"Here is the man who was caned—beaten like a dog—and who did not resent it!"

For many hours this insanity of mine must have waged. Till, at last, by sheer fatigue and lapse of time, it smoldered down into something like normal mentality, and I came to myself, wondering, at first, where I was.

Dusk had fallen. I was in the Montmartre district. I must have wandered in a half-circle, covering many miles, yet pausing at length only a mile or two from my starting-point.

Montmartre, in those days, as later, was the home of workmen, poor students, riffraff, café politicians, and the "red" political societies.

Not the safest place on earth, after nightfall. But, at that era of agitation, it was the home-ground of the most rabid of all the revolutionary factions.

I loosened my small sword in its sheath, looked about me to fix my location, and, walking in midstreet, beyond the shadows of the rickety houses, turned my steps homeward.

I was passing a café, when its door was flung open, and one or two men started out. I crossed the broad path of light from within. One of the men lurched accidentally against me, in emerging from the brightly illuminated interior into the dusk of the street.

The impact jarred him, and he gave vent to his feelings in one of those peculiarly offensive epithets for which the Paris pot-house politician is so justly celebrated.

At another time, I might have let it pass. But now, my nerves raw, up flared my temper. Catching the fellow suddenly by the shoulder, I shook him, as a puppy might shake a rag, and then threw him violently against the wall.

He gathered himself together with a

volley of lurid curses, pulled out an ugly, short knife, and sprang toward me.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

Now, I had done an asinine thing. I had forced a fight in a district where human life was held even cheaper than in the revolutionary courts of the day.

Also, my opponent was no doubt a member of one of the countless Montmartre clubs or gangs, and had probably a score of friends within easy call more than willing to take up their comrade's quarrel. I would be extremely lucky to escape alive.

Still, having brought on the trouble, I would not adopt the one sane course left to me, namely, take to my heels. I stood my ground, half drawing my sword as my assailant bounded forward. Then an odd thing happened.

The fellow halted—almost, as it seemed, in mid-leap. His truculent manner underwent a swift change.

"Pardon, citizen," he said, in brutal attempt at civility. "May I inquire your name?"

"My name is Braith," I replied, surprised.

"Citizen John Braith—American?" with a queer inflection on the last word. "Yes."

And I made as though to pass on.

"One moment," he ordered, barring my way, knife still gripped.

He blew four peculiarly modulated notes on a whistle he had snatched out of a pocket with his free hand. While I was still wondering at the action, and in doubt as to whether to thrust him to one side or to remain where I was, a half-dozen men ran out of the café.

"We are in luck!" cried the man who had summoned them. "And I am glad the meeting was still on in there. It would have been a pity to let such prey escape. And, in my hurry, I was nigh to choosing for my own meat what lawfully belongs to you all. Citizens! Brothers of the Montmartre Branch!" he went on oratorically. "Permit me to present an honored guest. Jack Braith—American!"

I had scarce opportunity to note again

that inflection on the word "American." For, at his speech, the half-dozen closed around me.

A little crowd had already collected in the dim street. The café door had swung shut, and we were almost in darkness.

I made as though to draw my sword. Two hands from behind pinioned my arms. I wrenched myself free; but not before another had seized my sword, and pulled it from the scabbard, and out of my reach.

Another patriot, carried away by zeal, threw himself upon me. My fist met his jaw, and he collapsed in the muddy roadway.

But what can one man do against six? I am no hero of Drury Lane melodrama. I struck out in all my strength, and more than one went down before my blows; while others reeled back, bruised and bleeding, into the crowd.

Yet the struggle was short. Others had joined the first comers. Soon I was overpowered by sheer force of numbers, and my arms were pinioned.

"So!" exclaimed the man, who had summoned the rest. "*That's* settled. Shall we carry him inside for his trial, or dispense wholly with the farce, and march straight to the Seine?"

"What does this mean?" I panted, still vainly struggling. "If you are pickpockets—"

"Pickpockets?" echoed the spokesman in high contempt. "Citizen Braith, we are as incorruptible as your beloved friend and patron, Maximilien Robespierre—whom may the guillotine feed upon!"

"Amen!" chorused other voices from the darkness.

"*A bas Robespierre!*" screamed a fishwife in the crowd.

The rabble took up the cry. Clearly, the "Incorruptible" was not popular here. And I, for some reason, was evidently supposed to be one of his supporters.

"Yell '*A bas Robespierre!*' Citizen Braith," suggested my first acquaintance, "and we may make your end less painful."

The idea appealed to the crowd, and a laugh arose.

"*A bas Robespierre!*" by all means,

if you like," I retorted as unconcernedly as might be. "It is all one to me!"

"See!" commented the man, "his own lieutenants cannot be loyal to the 'Incorruptible.' I'll wager that even Couthon or St. Just would also have—"

"Be still!" ordered a deeper voice, from the other side of the little circle. "That is not Citizen Braith's voice. I ought to know. Bring a torch, some one."

A *flambeau* was brought from a nearby huckster-stall. The deep-voiced man—who was taller and better dressed than his colleagues, and seemed in authority—thrust it in front of my face.

"There is some mistake here," he announced presently. "This is not Braith. Duval, you've made another of your stupid, absinthe-bred blunders."

"It is Braith," insisted the man with the knife. "He—"

"I ought to know," interrupted the other. "It is not he, or any one close to Robespierre."

"You are right, citizen," spoke up another. "This is not Braith. I've seen him a hundred times."

"Well," cheerfully observed the man called Duval, "why not kill him, anyhow, on general principles? It will be symbolic. Like burning Braith in effigy. What do you say, brothers?"

Another laugh went up at the gruesome pleasantry. But the leader intervened sharply:

"Are we patriots, or are we street-assassins?"

Personally I thought the two might amount to much the same.

"A mistake has been made here," he added. Turning to me, and offering me my sword, hilt foremost, he cut short the wrangle by saying:

"Citizen, pray accept our apologies. Ho, there! Give the citizen room to pass on his way. Good night!"

Dazed, my brain awl, I returned his bow, took the proffered sword, and passed through the sullenly parted throng, out into the silence of the night beyond.

As a man in a dream, I walked. My wonder is that I did not, in my absorption, fall victim to the first footpad.

Within the past thirty hours I had first been saved from a duel, because I

was mistaken, by ill light and other obstructions, for a friend of Robespierre's. Next, I had been able to rescue Elise from the convent, simply because my name was Braith. Now, I had been saved from nocturnal death, because, apparently, my name was *not* Braith.

Was ever mortal man in such another snarl? Was there any head or tail to the absurd, impossible situation?

I had, at first, thought Robespierre mistook me for one of his friends. The same supposition would account for his enemies' assault on me to-night.

But the name "Braith"? Why should it secure me the privileges of the convent-prison, and why should the statement that it was not my cognomen snatch me from death at the hands of the Montmartre Club? Why?

Oh, it was all beyond me. To dwell on it longer, I felt, was like to drive me mad.

But one thing, at least, my Montmartre adventure had accomplished. It had lifted me out of my despondent rage against fate and circumstances in general, and De Périer in particular. I saw that situation now at a better perspective and with saner eyes.

I had played the fool that morning. Instead of insisting on going over the whole misunderstanding quietly and logically with Elise and her father—driving with De Périer, if necessary, to the convent itself, for confirmation of my story—what had I done? I had blazed out like any drunken soldier, seeking, by frantic assertion, to batter down a gate of disbelief that only common sense could unbar. I had bellowed where I should have argued.

As a result, I had crushed Elise's dawning faith in my innocence, and I had subjected myself to a blow from a man too old to give satisfaction. Well, what was done might even yet be undone.

I put my pride and anger behind me—or, rather, both were overwhelmed by my greater love—and decided then and there to humiliate myself, by seeking out Elise and making one more appeal to her. Not for belief this time, but for a fair chance to prove myself guiltless.

If she would grant me such chance, I was prepared to seize this baffling

mystery by the throat, and—at cost of life, if need be—unveil it.

I reached the hotel, full of my new resolve. Passing the door of the De Périer suite, on my way to my own room, I saw a line of light below the threshold, and heard voices within.

Now that I had fought down my pride, I was minded not to let a night pass before putting my new resolution to the touch. I rapped lightly—for the hour was late—at the drawing-room door of the suite. Then I pulled myself together, determined not to let any rebuff of De Périer's turn me from my purpose or ruffle my wretched temper.

No reply came to my soft knock, the voices within the apartment drowning it. So I rapped again; this time harder.

The door, though I had not noted the fact, was on the latch. The impact of my hand swung it wide. It was ill-hung and its sill warped, or so light a pressure would scarce have opened it. The hotel and its equipment were old, and not in best repair.

As it was, I found myself standing on the threshold, looking into the brilliantly lighted room, whose occupants—grouped at the opposite side, and talking—had not heard even my second and louder knock.

Dazzled by the sudden glare of light, after the dark, I stood blinking on the threshold, trying to adjust my eyes to the light, and with my lips parted to apologize for having seemingly flung open the door unbidden.

But, though my mouth remained open, no words came. I stood, like the spectator at a stage-play, gazing speechless upon a scene being enacted at the far end of the long room.

CHAPTER IX.

MY CROWNING ACT OF FOLLY.

A TABLE was spread, whereon lay the remnants of a light supper. At one end of it sat M. de Périer, leaning back with a complacent smile on his withered old lips. His pale eyes were fixed affectionately on two people who had apparently just risen from the board.

One of these was Elise, still pale, but with a happy light in her glorious gray

eyes. The other was a man—tall, young, handsome—in traveling dress. On a chair near by lay his cloak, hat, and sword.

The man, with one arm, supported Elise, whose head rested on his shoulder. This was what had caught my eye and held me dumb.

As I looked, she was saying:

"Good night, then, *cheri!* And sleep well. A bridegroom should not look haggard on his wedding-day."

"If the sight of your dear face does not give me sweet dreams, nothing will," replied the stranger, stooping and kissing her. "So I—*Sacré!* who is this?" he broke off, catching sight of me.

With a little cry, Elise released herself from his arm and whirled about, fear in her eyes. De Périer, too, sprang shakily from his seat with a guttural cry.

The eyes of all three were fixed upon me. In the stranger's I read only surprise; in Elise's, a fear so intense that it actually hurt me; in De Périer's a senile fury.

"What do you wish?" asked the newcomer curtly.

"Nothing—now!" I answered, my voice sounding hoarse and strange even to my own ears.

It was the truth. I had no further object in being there. I had just seen that which struck me to the heart as all the horrors of the Reign of Terror had failed to do. For, in the scene I had witnessed, no great acumen was needed to show me my life-hopes lay dead.

Elise was betrothed; was evidently—from her words—about to become a bride. I am glad to recall that even then I did not blame her for her earlier kindly treatment of myself. In none of it, now that I reviewed our happy talk together, had she given me actual encouragement.

I had more than once hinted of my own great love. But she had not coquetted with me, nor offered anything that I could honestly term encouragement.

Yet I marveled that, in our weeks of close acquaintanceship in Paris, I had never before set eyes on this fiancé of hers. Had he but just arrived from a distance? Whoever he might be, and from wherever he might have come, I

could see his suit was not only favored by the girl, but by her father as well.

In France, fathers do not sit smiling by while their daughters are kissed by men whose attentions are unwelcome to the family. Elise had told me she was an only child. This embrace I had beheld could not, therefore, be fraternal. No, there was but one explanation, and that the simplest. And the future stretched out before me, dreary and barren as a rainy sea.

All at once I felt very old and very weary.

Hence, as I answered the stranger's brusque query, I bowed, and was stepping back through the doorway, when De Périer found his tongue.

"*Nothing?*" he queried fiercely, echoing my word. "It seems you add to your other accomplishments the gentle art of spying, M. Braith."

I did not answer. Indeed, I scarce heeded. Nothing mattered now. I was still withdrawing when, at sound of my name, the other man sprang forward to bar the exit.

"Braith?" he cried. "Is this the scoundrel of whom you told me, sir?"

"Yes," answered De Périer. "The cur whom I caned this morning, and who—"

"*Monsieur,*" exclaimed the stranger, "you shall not leave this room before giving me full satisfaction for your gross insult to Mlle. de Périer. You shall be taught that it is one thing to kidnap a young lady, whose only protector is old and feeble, and quite another to answer for that insult to a stronger man."

"Hush, Maurice!" whispered Elise in alarm. "The door is still open. Any one passing through the corridor might hear or see you. For my sake be prudent. Remember, it is death if—"

"If this *canaille* leaves the room alive," replied the man, but in a more guarded tone, as old De Périer, moved by sudden caution, shuffled across, and closed and bolted the door, near which I still stood. "If he escapes, I have no doubt he will tell the authorities of my presence in Paris. But I do not intend that he shall escape. Both on your account, Elise, and on my own. I have much to live for, just at present."

But Elise had not heeded the latter part of his speech. She was advancing toward me, her hands outstretched, her eyes big with appeal.

"*Monsieur*," she said brokenly, "we are in your power. Why should you persecute us? If you really came here to-night to spy upon the Comte de Grioux, I implore you to give up your wicked plan. He has not harmed you. He has harmed no one. He was proscribed, as you know, and fled to Brussels. At risk of his life, he has crept back here by stealth. But, on my honor, for no evil purpose. No plot against France. Oh, have mercy on—"

"Stop!" I broke in.

This agonized pleading for the man she loved was more than I could bear.

"Stop!" I repeated. "*Mademoiselle*, you are humiliating yourself to no purpose. I—"

"Oh!" she gasped, shrinking back, in misunderstanding of my words, and clasping her white little hands in entreaty. "But, for—"

"There has been enough of this, Elise!" interposed De Grioux, putting her behind him, and advancing on me. "This is my affair, not yours. I—"

But I was not minded to add one more blunder to the long score. I thrust the count aside, with no great gentleness, and again confronted her.

"*Mademoiselle*," I exclaimed, "when this refugee friend of yours interrupted me, I was about to say you were pleading to no purpose—simply because I had no idea, before I entered this room, that the Comte de Grioux was here, or even that he was in existence. After I leave this room—which, M. le Comte, I shall do at my own pleasure, and unchecked by you or any other man—after I leave this room, no one shall know from me that M. de Périér is putting his neck in peril by harboring a proscribed aristocrat. Of all this I give you most solemn assurance, which I beg you to believe. Whether or not the others choose to believe me, I care not in the least."

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed in relief. "I do believe you, and I—"

"But I do not," croaked old De Périér. "This man is a spy. Moreover, he has influence with the riffraff that calls itself the French government.

Otherwise, he could not have obtained order for Elise's imprisonment in the convent. If he is allowed to leave here—"

"He shall not be!" returned De Grioux. "Rest assured of that, sir. As for his being a spy, and the chances that he may denounce me, I neither know nor care. But, for his behavior yesterday toward Elise, his life shall answer. Stand back from that door!"

For I had already returned to it, and my fingers were on the bolt. I now turned slowly to face him.

"My young friend," I observed calmly, "I had the honor, a few minutes ago, to tell you I should leave this room at my own will. I have not changed my mind. Nor does the fact that you have picked up your sword from that chair deter me the least. I do not wish to fight you—for reasons which Mlle. de Périér will understand better than yourself."

"We will leave Mlle. de Périér's name out of it, if you please," he retorted stiffly. "The matter lies between you and me."

Yet, from the faint flush on her pale face, I saw that Elise understood—she knew I did not wish to fight De Grioux, because he was the man she loved, and because I was averse to harming what she held dear.

"You will fare better with my cane than with your sword, Maurice," jeered De Périér. "A thrashing is more in the fellow's line than a duel."

This, too, I endured without reply—again for Elise's sake. I turned once more to the doorway.

"Well, American," asked De Grioux, stepping, sword drawn, between me and the threshold, "is it true? Will you fight, or must I kill you, as I would any other pestilent vermin?"

"I have told you," said I, keeping myself in hand with difficulty, "that I do not want to fight. Construe my motives as you will."

"There is but one way to construe a coward's motives," he answered.

"Be it so," I said calmly, though my brain was ablaze at the unmerited affront.

"Though," he resumed, in sneering banter, "in your country, I understand, cowardice is more a virtue than otherwise.

The example, if I remember aright, was set by your worthy leader, General Washington."

I felt myself go white to the very lips. But I fought back my rage.

"Your ignorance of the greatest man the century has produced," said I quietly, "is ample excuse for—"

"Ignorance?" he mocked, seeing he had struck the right tack to provoke me. "*Ignorance?* No man but an ignorant Yankee bumpkin would attribute greatness to that Virginia farmer who turned traitor to King George. A traitor and—"

He got no further. My sword was out.

"M. de Périer," I cried as I sprang to the attack, "take your daughter to one of the inner rooms. Her *fiancé's* death may not be pleasant to witness."

Then we were at it hot and heavy, sword to sword, up and down the room, overturning chairs, smashing fragile table ornaments, kicking rugs into disarray.

I took the aggressive from the first, but did not fully let myself out until I saw, with the corner of my eye, M. de Périer forcibly draw the trembling Elise to the farther room and close the door on her.

Then I flew at my adversary with all the fury of a man whose country and whose country's idol have been insulted, with all the deadly fencing skill bred of long years' practise under the cleverest *maîtres d'armes* France could boast.

I had endured insults without number—a blow itself—in that room. It was good to be at last free to revenge my shameful injuries. And revenge them I would.

De Grieux was a strong man, and tall. He was a good swordsman, too. Yet, with the mysterious "fencer's instinct," I felt before we had fought thirty seconds that I was his master.

I pressed him back, little by little, forcing him ever to shift his ground, hurling in thrusts and lunges with all the speed and accuracy of an arm trained and strengthened by years of practise.

Now I parried one of his thrusts, feinted and lunged, eluding his guard and touching him on the chest.

It was but a flesh wound I scored, but I knew I would soon or late be able to drive home the finishing thrust. And

at sight of the fleck of blood that stained his shirt-ruffle a cold, relentless rage took hold of me, as I have known it to do on the battle-field. And I pressed my advantage the harder.

Brave man as he was, De Grieux knew he had met more than his match. Yet he fought on, despairingly, and with a fury equal to my own.

Our crossed blades grated and whined together, flashing forth long shimmering rays from the candle-light. We were beginning to breathe heavily, too.

De Périer's set, excited face came once into my range of vision. He had left the door of the inner room, and, in his tense interest, had drawn nearer and nearer to us as we fought.

After a series of thrusts, that De Grieux guarded with increasing uncertainty, I saw that all was ready for my final stroke. A bewilderingly swift feint that would leave his guard open to my lunge—and then—

The inner door was thrown open, and Elise advanced into the room. Her father saw her, and seized her shoulders as she would have run between us. But I had seen her face, in the candle-light.

And, at the unspeakable look in those wide luminous eyes of hers, my love surged back upon me, killing the death-hate that had just filled my whole being.

She loved this man, this man who fought at my mercy. Were I to slay him, the thrust that laid him low would kill her heart as well. And I who loved her would then be murderer alike of her lover and her love.

All at once I felt as if it were she, not De Grieux, who stood before me, awaiting death. At the thought, I knew I could not kill my adversary.

Yet I made the feint I had planned. Only, instead of driving my blade to the hilt through De Grieux's heart, I made a light, quick cut that struck from his waistcoat the lowest lapel button.

The button had been directly above his heart. He noted what I had done, and he understood that I held his life in the hollow of my hand, and—was sparing it.

As his sword wavered, in momentary confusion at my inexplicable act of mercy, I made use of another trick I had long ago learned.

With a sudden wrench, my blade slid down his, and jerked it from his hand. His sword flew across the room, and struck the far wall.

Starting back, as I disarmed him, De Grioux's foot caught in a crumpled rug, and he fell heavily to the floor. The impact of his head on the polished boards momentarily stunned him, and he lay motionless.

But, as though in echo to the sound of his fall, a second crash sounded from the other side of the room. The bolted outer door flew open, with a rending of rotten wood, and through the gaping aperture poured uniformed men.

"In the name of the Republic of France!" roared the foremost.

A glance told me these were not mere gendarmes, drawn thither by the sound of fighting. They wore the National Guard uniforms, and their leader's chest was crossed by the dreaded insignia of the Committee of Public Safety.

And then I knew. Word must somehow have reached the government that the Comte de Grioux, proscribed aristocrat, had ventured back to Paris.

His whereabouts being known, a squad of guardsmen had been sent to arrest him here in his insecure hiding-place. Hence the unheralded assault upon the room, designed in order to give the prey no time nor chance to escape.

Every hotel, every lodging-house had its government spies in those days. De Grioux's love must indeed have been strong, thought I, to lure him here almost to certain capture.

But the French aristocrats ever lacked forethought. Had they not, there need have been no French revolution.

De Périer and Elise alike understood, even as had I, the cause of the intrusion. The lieutenant in command strode toward us.

"Which is the *émigré* Grioux?" he asked sternly, looking in doubt from myself to the man on the floor, who now began to stir feebly.

So! The guillotine was to finish what I had begun! Well, it was decidedly no affair of mine. I shrugged my shoulders, and slipped my sword back into its sheath.

"Which is Citizen Grioux?" repeated

the lieutenant more harshly. "Answer in the name of the—"

As ill luck would have it, his eye fell on Elise this time. The question was addressed to her. Like a little child, afraid, her eyes turned to me in what I read for the very sublimity of appeal.

And then I committed my crowning act of folly.

"I am the Comte de Grioux, at your service, my man," said I in an offensively haughty tone. "What do you wish of me?"

Elise drew in her breath sharply. De Périer stared unbelieving. At hearing my admission, the lieutenant had drawn a paper from his belt.

"Citizen Grioux," he declaimed in a nasal, singsong tone, "in the name of the French Republic, represented by the Committee of Public Safety, I arrest you. Fall in!" he ordered his men.

Two of them stood on either side of me.

"Citizen Grioux," resumed the lieutenant, in the same singsong, "you are charged—"

"Did you address me?" came a dazed, muddled voice from the floor behind us.

De Grioux had risen on one elbow. Still but half-conscious, and uncertain as to where he was, he had dimly caught the repetition of his own name, and had replied to it. I must act quickly.

"Be still!" I shouted to him in affected contempt, "or must my sword teach you another lesson, American? It is lucky you come in force, lieutenant," I went on braggingly, "or I should serve you as I served that fellow Braith there, who dogged me to this room, and sought to arrest me in the same name of your upstart republic.

"Come," I added, "if I am to be jailed for the crime of being better born than scum like yourselves, let us be moving. There is no need to read me the list of my offenses. I have no wish that this lady and her father should be further distressed on my account. I forced my way in here upon them, hoping to borrow money for my needs. But they are so foolish as to be attached to that same rag-bag republic of yours, and they ordered me away. Come! We waste time."

"March!" ordered the lieutenant,

taking my sword from its scabbard, and leading the way toward the door.

I followed close at his heels, my two guards clanking along on either side of me.

"No! No!" screamed Elise, starting from her daze of horror, and struggling to fling herself forward past her father's detaining arms, "you *must* not! Lieutenant, he is—"

But De Périer's hand closed over her mouth, choking back the cry.

And so I left them.

"*Vive la Guillotine!*" shrilled a be-lated street urchin, as we passed into the midnight darkness of the Rue St. Honoré.

CHAPTER X.

SHADRACH BEMIS, MIRACLE-WORKER.

THROUGH the stillness of the almost empty Paris streets we marched, my captors and I. The tramp of feet and clicking of martial accouterments echoed from the tall houses lining the roadway.

We crossed the Boulevard. To my surprise, we did not turn toward either the Conciergerie or La Force, the two foremost prisons, but in a different direction from either.

"Where are we going?" I asked the lieutenant.

"To jail," he answered laconically.

"Really!" I exclaimed in mock amazement. "I fancied, from your weird costumes, that we were on our way to a comic masquerade."

Now, if there was one thing a French National Guardsman adored in those days, it was his gaudy uniform. Many a duel was fought with those who criticized the absurd costume. So, as I had intended, my sneer added tenfold to my escort's hitherto impersonal dislike for myself.

I was glad of this. The more they hated me the surer they were not to suspect they had made any error in my arrest. I wished to be taken to the prison office. To be locked up for the night, if possible, as the Comte de Grioux.

This would give the real De Grioux ample time to escape from Paris and to take Elise and her father along, if might be.

For myself, now that I had time to think matters over, I had little to fear. I was an American citizen. As such, the French government would think twice before beheading me. All I need do was to make known my plight to the Hon. Gouverneur Morris, our minister to France.

We made our way through an alley or two, and thence northward. I knew now where we must be going. For that way lay the prefecture of police.

There I was doubtless to be lodged for the night and undergo my preliminary examination next morning, prior to commitment to one of the prisons.

As we came out upon the wider thoroughfare again, beyond the Halles, I descried a figure crossing the street in front of us. One glance was enough. And, despite the lieutenant's sharp order for silence, I called:

"Bemis! Shadrach Bemis!"

The old trapper, on the way home from one of his customary nightly rambles, heard and turned toward me, his lean face screwed up with astonishment at my odd plight.

"*Le Grand Sauvage!*" laughed the lieutenant, recognizing him.

But Bemis shoved past him, and was at my side.

"How in blazes—" he began.

I cut him short, and told him briefly and in English as much of my story as was needful. This I had to do in decidedly few words. For the guards, as quickly as possible, thrust us asunder.

"Shall I shoot one of 'em, an' give you a chance to cut an' run?" Shadrach asked.

"No," I answered. "I'm going to the prefecture. Go, first thing in the morning, to the American embassy. Tell—"

"I understand," he called back, as the guards broke off my instructions by hustling me away.

And I felt I could safely leave my case in the shrewd old backwoodsman's hands. So, with a lighter heart, I accompanied my captors to the prefecture.

There my name and pedigree were demanded by a yawning, bleary-eyed desk official. Feigning sullenness, I refused to answer.

The official, eager to get back to bed, gruffly consigned me to a cell for the

night. Thither I was conducted. As soon as the iron door clanged shut behind me, I threw myself on the narrow board cot, and in a moment was deep in the heavy slumber of physical and mental fatigue.

It was not yet sunrise when a gen-darme opened my cell door, roused me, and ordered me into the outer office. The same sleepy fellow was at the desk. Beside him lolled Shadrach, a court interpreter at his elbow.

"That's him!" observed Bemis, as I was led forth. "Well, young feller," he continued, addressing me with a canting air of disapproval, "a nice mess you've got us all into, ain't ye? What your pore old father'll say, I don't know. I've told them 'ere gentlemen you can't speak a word of French. So they've got an interp'ter to do the talkin', if any's needed."

I was at sea to explain this cryptic speech. All I could gather from it was that I was supposed to know no French. But why, I could not imagine.

"This p'lice officer," went on Bemis, "is goin' to give you one more chance. But I've told him if any of his men ketches you on another spree, they're to lock you up fer a month. Come on home now."

The grinning interpreter kept up a running translation, under his breath, for the official's amusement. Bemis affixed a sprawling signature to two papers, slipped a louis into the interpreter's hand, caught me roughly by the coat, and led me out through the vaulted archway into the street.

There he linked his arm in mine and set off at a tremendous pace.

"What—what does it all mean?" I demanded in amaze.

"It means your plumb foolishness came near gettin' you into all sorts of trouble," he replied, never checking his gait. "Lord, son, what a night you've give me! We're goin' pretty fast now, but it's the slowest I've moved since you an' me parted last evenin'."

"Where have you been? What—"

"Where *ain't* I been? Fust to the hotel, where I makes bold to drop in fer advice on your Périer friends. My! What a state they was in! But Miss Elise manages to tell me all about it.

All about your crazy actin'! Son, that business was the wildest, unreasonabest, worst thing I ever heard on. An'—an' I'd like to shake your silly hand!"

Which he did with muscular fervor; then resumed:

"T'other feller had decamped by the time I got there. He got away with a whole skin, thanks to you. Then I went to the United States Embassy. Minister Morris was just home from a ball, an' I guess he was pretty tired, for it was past midnight. But he saw me."

"I told you not to go there till this morning," I interrupted.

"So you did. So you did. But I'm bad at obeyin' orders. Besides, I had a kind of sneakin' notion that this was a case where a little hurry wouldn't do no great harm to any one. 'Cept, maybe, to the count feller."

"It was on his account I wanted you to wait till this morning, so he might have time to escape."

"Yes. Wa'al, mournin' clo'es is pretty dear. But we needn't 'a' wore any on his account. So off I goes to Gouverneur Morris, like I told you."

"And he arranged my release, of course. I must call to-day and thank him. But why did you make such a queer scene just now at the—"

"Son, you make more mistakes in fewer words than any man I ever met," answered Bemis. "For one thing, Morris *didn't* arrange your release. For another, you'd better not call on him to-day. An—"

"Didn't arrange my release?" said I in astonishment. "Then how in—"

"It was old Shadrach Bemis what got you off," he announced, with a ludicrous self-complacency.

"Look here!" I cried, angered by his conceited air. "I was arrested last night as the Comte de Grioux, a proscribed aristocrat. That is a case for Fouquier-Tinville, and then the guillotine. Even Morris's influence would be strained, to prove me an American and not an *émigré*—and to induce the French government to take a lenient view of my share in De Grioux's escape. So why do *you* claim you set me free?"

"I don't know *why* I said it, son," he answered ruefully, "unless, maybe, because 'twas so."

I saw at last that there was something more than mere boasting in his words. The trapper was in earnest.

"Tell me about it," I suggested, still in doubt.

"I went to Morris," he began, nothing loath, "an' I told him the story. When I got to your name, up he flies in a temper. Says he's sick o' the very name of 'Braith.' Says you're a scoundrel, sneakin' under an American name an' cit'z'nship, an' not entitled to either. He won't git Uncle Sam's fingers burnt in no more of your scrapes, he says, an' th' law can take its course. Then—"

"What?" I gasped. "Gouverneur Morris said this of—me?"

"That, an' a lot more jest as flatterin'; an' winds up by stampin' out of the room, an' sayin' he'll hear nothin' more."

"But I don't understand. I never met Minister Morris, and none of my affairs have yet come before him for adjustment. What can he mean by—"

"Let's git to that later. I've got an idee of my own. Will I go on with this story, or won't I?"

"Go ahead," I said confusedly, my brain sick with bewilderment. "What next?"

"Out he stamps, leavin' me alone in his place. I was just goin' to foller, when I thinks maybe I'll have better luck with some of his sec'taries. So I hangs around, waitin' for one of 'em to happen in on the way to bed. Just to amoose myself, I looks over some of the papers layin' around loose on the study table. Dretful untidy chap, that Morris man is."

"You mean you read his private papers?"

"I don't know how private they was. Most of 'em was in French, an' didn't mean much to me. But I found one, with an English translation pinned onto it. I read that one. It was kind of int'restin'."

"And you read a personal document of—"

"I sure did. An' you'd better be thankful, instead of so stiff about it. 'Cause, if I hadn't read it, you'd still be coolin' them gilded heels of your'n in jail."

"Was it about me, then?"

"Not till I made it so. It was a

letter from an American, whose son had got into some kind of trouble over here. The feller was in jail, on charge of insultin' the gov'ment. His father's a Senator, an' he'd got Gin'r'l Washington to endorse his letter, askin' Morris to get the lad off, an' sent it to Morris. An' Morris got a order of release from th' C'mittee of Public Safety, an'—Say, son," he interpolated, "these Frenchies sure don't know a joke when they see one. If they did, they'd a died a laughin' every time they heard that measly c'mittee called 'Safety.' It's about as 'safe' as an angry rattler. I'd sooner—"

"But—"

"Oh, the story? I forgot. Waal, the documents was all pinned together, translations an' all, an' tacked to that one long sheet of paper. The order of release was dated yesterday. An' it was made out in blank. Out o' compliment to Morris, I 'spose. I reckon it had come that evenin', while Morris was out, an' he hadn't had chance yet to—"

"So you—"

"I just unpinned the order from the rest, for fear it might fall into some dishonest feller's hands. It was foolish for Morris to leave it layin' about so careless. For all he knew, it might 'a' been used to git some other pore pris'ner out o' jail. To make 'sartin it shouldn't be misused that way, I jest put temptation out of anybody else's reach by fillin' in *your* name."

"Good old Bemis! Good old boy!" I cried. But—"

"Or, leastways, 'twasn't your name, but this mister Dee Groo's."

"De Grieux's?"

"That's the one. I'd made Miss Elise spell it out fer me; an' I wrote it straight. Then, seein' I wasn't wanted at Morris's, an' jest nacherally hatin' to be a unwelcome guest, I leaves the embassy, an'—"

"And came to the prefecture with the order?"

"Not me. I hunted round till I found a jonny-darm that could speak some English, an' I found from him where the court interp'ter lived, an' I routed him out of bed and brought him along. Told him 'bout how I was your old uncle, sent over from the States to

bring you back. Said you was a drinkin', dissoloot youngster, an' that you'd got inter trouble before, an' I was goin' to take you straight home. An' I gave the interp'ter a bit of gold every few minutes, to pay him for his bother in gettin' up so early. By the time we got to the jail, he loved me like a white-haired twin brother."

"Oh, you clever old fraud!" I exclaimed. "I'll never—"

"Oh, yes, you will. Next time you git mad at me. But never mind all that. The interp'ter sailed into that feller in charge of the desk in a way to satisfy the most fastijis. T'other feller wasn't fairly awake; an' all he could see clear was a couple of gold looeys I passed him. He had you turned out of your cage, an'—an' here we are! If we'd 'a' waited till later, there'd 'a' been a whole lot of nosey jacks-in-office in charge there, an' we mightn't 'a' got off so easy."

"But De Grioux is a French name," I objected. "Why, didn't they know an American wouldn't have such a—"

"What does any of these furreners know about our country? The interp'ter ach'ly asked me was it true we hunted buff'lo in Noo York. What'd they know of America or American names? No more than a Yankee p'liceman would know of French."

"Shad," I said, in amaze at it all, "do you know you've committed theft from our own embassy? That you've cheated the French government? That you—"

"That you're walkin' free, instead of takin' a course of guill'tine shavin'?" he supplemented. "That last is all I care about. We'll jest put the rest down to the charge account. But I'm kind o' sorry I had to fool that interp'ter. He was a nice feller. Seemed real int'rested in how I came to lose my scalp. An'—"

"So you told *him* the scalp story, too?" I queried. "What version, this time?"

"The true one," he snapped. "Same as I tell every one. Same as I told Minister Morris last night. I—"

"Did you tell Gouverneur Morris about—"

"I—well—that is, I kind of pleaded with him when he wouldn't help me.

I p'inted to my head, where a British shell had took off a part of the scalp, an' begged him, in mem'ry of my patriotic wound, to—*now*, what are you laughing at?" he ended peevishly.

"Shad," I groaned in despair, "that's the twelfth utterly different version of your last scalp that I've—*hallo*," I broke off, "what's all this?"

We had turned into the square, where stood the Abbaye prison, and were about half-way across the open space. From a street to the right, burst into the square a screaming, cursing mob of men, women, and children. They were fighting, tooth and nail, to break through a tight cordon of National Guardsmen, and to attack some one who walked in the center of the clump of soldiers.

A second glance—even at that distance—showed me the prisoner they were striving to murder was a woman—a young girl.

CHAPTER XI.

A RED INTERLUDE.

FOR a moment my heart stood still. To me, the sight of a girl in the hands of the French law meant but one thing—Elise Périer. And, illogical in my dread, I ran forward toward the oncoming throng.

A statue of "Equality" stood in the center of the square. For better view, I jumped up on its high pedestal; Shadrach scrambled up beside me.

"What ails you, son?" he queried, eying the advancing crowd.

But I had caught a glimpse of the captive's face; and, at sight of it, I heaved a great sigh of relief. It was not Elise. It was no one I had ever before seen; yet, my first reaction over, there was something in her look that held my gaze, and that seemed to draw the heart out of me.

It was not that the girl was beautiful, or even because she was in peril of instant death. Her face was not lovely. Not really pretty. But one to compel attention.

She was short—little more than a child in statue—but with a rather broad, powerful figure. Her long brown hair had come undone, and poured in heavy

masses over her shoulders, framing a dead-white face, whose huge gray eyes glowed with an unearthly light that seemed to illumine her whole countenance.

She was plainly clad. Not as a servant, but as perhaps a small shop-keeper's daughter might be dressed. Her step had the grace, and her bearing the glad fearlessness of a pagan priestess.

Four deep around her marched the guard, while other soldiers, with bayonet and musket-butts, sought to batter back the surging throng. But the mob threw itself madly on the opposing weapons, shrieking, cursing, mouthing horrible threats, shaking fists and clubs at the barely protected maiden, who, as though unconscious of their presence, strode on amid her encircling captors.

The crowd was made up of the scum of Paris. Frowzy-haired fishwives, purple of face and streaming-haired; ragamuffins that looked as if they had been hurled from some filthy underworld by an upheaval of Mother Earth. These, and a score of other types of the day, bred of the hideously satiric slogan "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!"

There was nothing new in the rabble to hold my attention. But I marveled none the less at their presence. A single prisoner, or even a group of such, haled to the nearest jail, was no novelty in those days. Scarce enough so to evoke a stray glance, a handful of mud, or the cry "*A bas les Aristocrats!*"

Yet here were close upon a thousand riffraff, not only accompanying a prisoner's trip to the cells, but trying to tear her to pieces on the way thither.

What did it mean? A larger, more rabid assemblage could scarce have gathered to escort Queen Marie Antoinette herself to the guillotine.

The soldiers, on their route to L'Abbaye, passed close by the base of the "Equality" statue, on whose tall pedestal Shadrach and I were standing. The pressure of the throng, eddying about the base, caused, by sheer weight of numbers, a momentary halt in the procession's march.

In that brief rest, before the outlying guards could beat a passage for their fellows through the press, the girl seemed to become aware, for the first

time, of the mob's presence. Lifting her head proudly, she faced that yelling, seething crowd, and, in a voice like a silver trumpet's, cried aloud:

"My friends! My brothers! What I have done was done for the Fatherland! For France! I—"

She got no further. A mingled howl and roar from the rabble drowned her clarion shout. At the same instant the guards clove a way through the press, and the ghastly procession took up its march again at faster pace.

A crippled beggar, who had been left behind in the increased rate of speed, paused for breath at the statue base. I leaned over and accosted him.

"Citizen," I asked, tossing him a franc, "who is the prisoner? And what has she done?"

"I don't know," he answered impatiently over his shoulder, as he hobbled off, yelling "Down with her!"

But my gift of a coin had excited the cupidity of one of the street gamins who hung to the outskirts of the mob. Noticing my action, he dashed back to where we stood, and held his cap upward for a similar offering.

"I know what it's all about!" he squawked in pride. "For a franc I'll tell you."

I held the silver piece in my hand above his head, but did not drop it into his waiting, ragged cap.

"Speak first," I ordered.

"Citizen Marat," he announced, fairly bursting with the joy of being first to tell any one the great news. "Citizen Marat—the liberator, the friend of the people, the—"

"What of him?" I inquired, shuddering inwardly at mention of the fanatic demagogue's name. "What of him?"

"He is dead! Murdered in his bath. *She*," jerking his thumb toward the vanishing procession, "she killed him. Her name is Corday, curse her! Charlotte Corday!"

CHAPTER XII.

SHADRACH'S IDEAS.

THE fanatic, glorified face of Charlotte Corday still fresh in my memory,

I continued on my way, with Bemis, back toward our hotel. I wanted to make one more appeal to De Périer to take his daughter out from this accursed city, ere he and she should become hopelessly enmeshed in the ever-spreading terror-web.

Also, I was human enough to long for an interview with Elise, in the light of the previous evening's happenings. I knew she had noted to the full my quixotic service to her betrothed, and that such service must go far toward wiping from her thought the former ill opinion of me that had been forced upon them.

My act had not been that of a spy or a kidnaper. Even prejudiced old De Périer must recognize that.

Though she was lost to me, and about to wed another man, it none the less gave me a little, miserable thrill of joy to feel I had softened her contempt of me. All I now asked was to guard and serve her.

If she was to be the wife of another, and if my own future life was to be but a grave of love's memories, I was none the less minded to help her to what happiness and refugee existence could offer.

If my unselfishness could not force me to include De Griex in my kinder feelings, who could blame me? I had acquired a very lively and natural dislike for the graceful, brave young noble. What unsuccessful lover would not?

Shadrach Bemis, as we walked along, broke in on my reverie, bringing me violently back to the present.

"Son," he observed, "from that mooney look of your'n, I take it you're thinkin' of Miss Elise. An' nice and nat'ral it is for you, too. Only this ain't the time for sech sugary dreams. You got suthin' livelier to rastle with jest now."

"What, for instance?" I asked, humoring him.

"Oh, but it must be grand to be a youngster!" he retorted. "To be ramblin' along on the edge of a cañon, half an inch from the prec'pice, an' yet be able to think of nothin' but a pretty gal!"

"You think I'm in danger?"

"I don't *think* nothin' about it," he

said grimly, "I *know* it. While you've been mixin' up in love business, I've been doin' some figurin' in my mind. An' I've come to two or three kinds o' queer conclusions. Want to hear 'em? Don't trouble to, unless—"

"Go ahead!" I replied. "What are they?"

"Fust of all," he began slowly, "there's some one in Paris who ain't a double of yours, nor a twin brother, nor any of them story-book things, but who looks enough like you to cause a whole lot of—"

"I've gathered that much already," I interposed, "and—"

"An' have you figgered it out any further?"

"No," I admitted, "I have not. Have—"

"Wa'al, I have. You don't know anything about him, more'n that he's most likely one of the he-coons of this rev'lotion outfit, an' that some folks—Robbyspeer an' his gang—thinks pretty high of him; an', thanks to that, he stands solid while the Robbyspeer bunch is on top. Likewise, that there's a whole passel of other folks as'd look on it as a reel Sunday-school treat to be able to snuff him out. That's all you know about this 'ere feller who's been gitten you in such a mess of scrapes lately. Now—"

"Yes," I agreed, "that's all I know of him. And most of that is conjecture. But—"

"But *he* knows a whole lot more about *you*, son."

"About me? Absurd! Why he probably doesn't even know I exist. He—"

"Don't know you exist, eh? I s'pose that accounts fer his usin' your name so free an' promiskus?"

"Good Lord, man! I never connected—"

"Of course you didn't. You was spendin' your val'ble time sighin' about a girl, an' trying to rime 'love' with 'dove.' An' yet, when you're sane, you're a real clever chap. Honest, I wonder at your thickness these days. Wake up, man, if you don't want ol' Missus Guill'tine to put you to sleep for good. Want to hear more of my ideas?"

"Yes," I said, all attention now, "I do."

"This mysterious feller," pursued Shadrach, "maybe hasn't seen you. He mayn't even know you're in France. An' he's passin' himself off as you. He got Robbyspeer an' the public prosecutor to let him put Miss Elise into that convent place, an' sign *your* name to the commitment. Now, the prosecutor chap might be bribed to do that; but Robbyspeer's said to be so straight he bends backward. That's what I can't make out. How'd he get such a hold over Robbyspeer, an' by usin' your name? If he's a rev'lutionist boss, Robbyspeer must know all about him, an' must know his real name ain't Braith an' that he ain't an American. Yet he seems—"

"Whoever he is," I put in, remembering the scene at Montmartre, "he is known as 'Jack Braith, American.' And, from the way people add the 'American,' it looks as if they don't believe it, or that they are just quoting his own words about himself. How could he have got hold of my name? And for what reason? We've only been here a few weeks. He must have assumed the name before then. So it can't be that my arrival in Paris has—"

"Jest what I said," chimed in Shadrach. "I doubt if he even knows you're in France. You've been livin' pretty quiet, up to yesterday, an'—"

"But if he doesn't know I'm here—"

"If he doesn't, he's sure to find it out mighty soon. Some of these spies that happens to know him are sure to mention there's another 'Jack Braith, American,' stayin' in town. An' when he finds that out—"

"Then we can meet, and I—"

"Oh, son!" scoffed Bemis, "you're plumb foolish. D'ye s'pose he's stole your name an' nationality jest for a measly joke? Not he. I don't know what his reasons is, but you can gamble they're good, useful ones. So it looks plain to me he won't be over happy at learnin' that the real Jack Braith turned up in Paris. Two Jack Braiths is one too many. An' it ain't much of a stretch to figger out that he's likely to fix up a little guill'tine party for your ben'fit, as soon as he finds you. Now do you see you're in danger here?"

"No," I returned, "not in the least. These crazy revolutionists can cut off each other's heads to their heart's content, but when it comes to laying hands on an American citizen, our minister will have something to say. And when Uncle Sam orders 'Hands off!' people have a way of obeying him."

"H'm!" grunted Shadrach. "All you say 'bout Uncle Sam is true, son. But when it comes to your own case, that's a horse of another color. Didn't Minister Morris git madder'n a wet hen the very minute I says your name? I couldn't count on findin' one of them blank release orders *every* time I happen to drop in on him. Next time it might—"

"That's true!" I had to confess. "This man who's stolen my name seems to have used it and my nationality once too often, as far as Gouverneur Morris is concerned. I'm afraid I could look for little help, after all, from our embassy."

"He's imposed on Morris, somehow," went on Shadrach, "an' Morris has found out he ain't American. So, if it came to your usin' that same Jersey name to git you out of jail, you'd be li'ble to stay behind bars all your life, before the minister'd help you. No, son. You see whar you stand. You're jest a coquettin' with the guill'tine, by hangin' on here in Paris. Let this feller git on your trail—which he's bound to before long—an' you're a dead man."

"Upon my soul," I laughed uncomfortably, "you're a cheery companion!"

"I ain't extra strong on refined humor," retorted Bemis, "but I'm talkin' good horse-sense, an' you know it. I'll tell you suthin' else, that any one but a lover would 'a' seen before now. This other feller has reasons for wantin' to git Miss Elise comf'tably out of the way. So he put her in the convent. What them reasons of his are I don't know, not bein' a prophet nor a mind-reader. But they must 'a' been pretty strong ones to make him risk the chance of gettin' nabbed for misusin' state dockments fer pers'nal grudges. An'—"

"But, tell me, what harm has Mlle. de Périér—?"

"Besides," he went on, unheeding,

"it's dollars to doughnuts that it was him who sicked the National Guards onto that De Groo count last night. Must have spies at the hotel. When them spies tell him Miss Elise got away from the convent, he'll start another game to get her locked up, if he ain't done it already. There, son! Don't look so sick. Pull yourself together and face it like a man."

I had quickened my pace almost to a run in my haste to reach the hotel. But the backwoodsman's long, easy stride readily kept up with me.

"He'll most likely ask questions at the convent, too," continued Shadrach. "Then I'd like to see his face when the abbess tells him it was Jack Braith that let Miss Elise out. That'll give him the tip you're in Paris, if he ain't already got it from somewhere else. You got *scandalous* little time to waste, Jack."

"What do you advise, then?"

"Git your traps together, an' light out o' Paris before night."

"And leave Elise here to—"

"You can't help her any by stayin'. Make her come away, too. If she won't, then kidnap her, if you like. I'll help you. Carry her and the old man acrost

(*To be continued.*)

the frontier. I'll think up some way to 'arrange it."

I made no reply. We had turned into the Rue St. Honoré, and I broke into a run. Into the hotel I dashed, and up-stairs to De Périer's suite.

The door swung wide. Within, a man was moving. I entered without ceremony. It was no time for etiquette observances.

I came upon Gelat, the proprietor, taking inventory of some personal effects that lay scattered about.

"Where is—" I began.

He cut me short with a grunt of anger.

"Gone!" he snapped. "He and the citizeness, his daughter. An hour ago. A pretty name this sort of thing will give my poor hotel with the government! To think that—"

"Gone?" I repeated. "They have left Paris?"

"They will leave Paris by way of heaven," he grinned. "They were arrested—both of them—by a squad of National Guardsmen. For the crime of 'harboring and aiding a proscribed aristocrat.' The guillotine deals quickly with such cases."

Her Ideal in the Gray Overcoat.

By R. K. THOMPSON.

The man she saw in the street-car, regretted she should never see again, only to have him turn up in the guise of a thoroughly unwelcome visitor.

"THERE," I decided, stealing a second glance across the street-car, "sits my ideal man!"

The Adonis in the light-gray overcoat looked in my direction, and I hastily lifted my eyes to the advertisement of a breakfast-food farther down the car.

Riding up-town to the studio-apartment I shared with Grace Marshall, an old school-chum, my idle gaze out of the opposite window had suddenly been obscured by the broad shoulders and handsome head of the man who dropped into the vacant seat across the aisle.

Unconcernedly, I swept another glance at him. From the crown of his becom-

ing derby to the tips of his shapely shoes—taking in his clean-cut face, athletic build and well-formed, perfectly-gloved hands—he was the capitalized Real Thing in twentieth-century Prince Charmings. Aware of my eyes upon him, he glanced at me again—to discover my gaze riveted on a section of atmosphere eight inches above his head. When I felt him look away I took another peep at him out of the corner of my eye.

Why was it, I wondered a bit petulantly, that conventionality made it so hard to meet people you didn't know, but liked on sight?

Here was an utter stranger, a man

whose looks I admired, who would always be utterly a stranger to me because convention labeled him, "not properly introduced."

I liked the way he sat, the way he held his head, the way he had looked at me twice, without staring. Yet he was simply a figure glimpsed in the passing show about me; I should never see him again after I left the car at the next corner.

Which, of course, didn't matter, for I am not "wooshy," as Grace defines the sentimental woman's state of being. I would continue to exist quite happily despite the fact that I never knew the handsome stranger.

Only—I did wish we could have met; I wanted to find out if he were really as nice to talk to as he was nice to look at.

As I signaled the conductor to stop at the next crossing, snuggling closer the portfolio of sketches I carried under my arm, I shouldn't again have noticed the man as I rose—if he hadn't walked down the aisle before me, and descended from the car at the same corner.

By a coincidence he was getting off at my street. I watched him reach the sidewalk ahead of me, from whence he might depart in any one of three directions—up or down the avenue, or along the street down which I was to go.

Unhesitatingly, he took the latter course. Following, I momentarily expected him to disappear into some one of the shops or office-buildings along the way. But he kept right straight ahead, his more vigorous pace separating us by fully a quarter of a block, yet his graceful figure still plainly in view.

I had just asked myself where he was going, for the fifth time in two minutes, when I started forward with an exclamation of surprise.

The man had turned into the entrance of the very building for which I was headed. I saw his familiar gray overcoat vanish into the hallway of the tall, sandstone-fronted edifice where Grace and I had our top-floor abode.

There was nothing unusual in the fact that he had gone in there; the building held a score of studios and apartments, at any one of which he might be calling. Yet the coincidence of his leaving the car at the same time I did struck me as

a little odd, since his final destination was the same as mine. I hurried after him.

As I entered the hall the clang of a closing elevator-door greeted my ears. I was too late for more than a fleeting sight of well-known gray, glimpsed through the grille-work of the cage which rose with him out of my sight.

He was gone. As I waited for the second of the two elevators our building boasts, I told myself that I had seen the last of Mr. Gray Overcoat—and I only sighed once.

Stepping out at my floor, I searched for my keys, which so persistently eluded me in some crevice of my bag that my eyes and hands were busily hunting them as I turned down the hall.

Then, the little bunch lightly jingling in my hand, I lifted my eyes and looked toward my workshop-home. And the sight that there met my astonished gaze brought me up sharply with a gasp of amazement.

The man who had preceded me from the street-car, up the street, and into this very building, *was now entering the door of my apartments!*

There was no doubt about it. Before my very eyes his unmistakable figure stepped across the threshold. I saw and heard the door close after his easily recognizable gray overcoat.

I felt the strength running like the fairy-tale gunpowder out at my knees, as the horrifying thought flashed like a white-light of truth into my brain. He was a burglar.

My portfolio, and with it my bag, slipped, unheeded, to the floor after the keys, which dropped from my nerveless fingers. I leaned weakly against the wall, my trembling limbs jarring into being a million goose-pimples of fright on my body.

The rooms that Grace and I occupied were at the mercy of the man I had seen entering our apartments as coolly and calmly as though they were his own, to plunder as he would. My chum had gone out that morning to visit a dozen music-pupils. I did not expect her back until long after I had returned from the office of the art editor of a down-town magazine, upon whom I had called that afternoon.

What was I to do? How was this

daylight marauder, who might even now be uninterruptedly taking possession of our silverware, to be removed? Should I send for the janitor, or summon one of the elevator-boys by a touch on the bell near at hand, and call a policeman to take him in charge.

And how had he opened the door, by the way? I had arrived on the scene too late to discover by what means he had effected an entrance; he was just going into the studio when I looked up after stepping out of the elevator.

Curiosity, at length, overcame my timidity, and I stole with silent caution along the hall to the door of our apartments. Examination proved that it had not been "jimmied;" the man had probably used a skeleton-key, or else he had delicately picked the lock.

He was evidently a hardened expert at the business, I thought, for only long experience could have taught him to open a door as neatly as this one had been unlocked. It seemed a pity, too, that such a handsome fellow—a man whose face appeared to hold so much honesty of purpose and strength of character—could stoop to the occupation of a common flat-robber.

If I had not actually seen him enter that door I never would have believed it possible that he had done it. I blushed to recall my thoughts of him of five minutes before—a man I had branded on sight as my ideal was a *burglar*!

But I had no time to waste in vain regret over the discovered clay feet of yet another shattered idol. Every moment I passed in inaction meant a lengthened opportunity for the man inside to rob our home.

As I stood outside the door, the thought of the robber within rifling our household goods roused in me the instinct latent in every one to fight for his or her home when that cherished possession is menaced. Anger against the man who had dared to enter our rooms thrilled me. I was no longer afraid. I would enter the studio and myself remove its overbold occupant.

I put out my hand, the strength of my purpose stilling the cowardly trembling of my limbs, and softly turned the handle. The door was locked, the spring-catch had fastened in its closing—and I

dropped my fingers from the knob with a little sigh of relief. It was all very well for a righteous indignation at the desecration of my home to fill me with a desire to drive out the invader. But to enter alone an apartment in which a strong, healthy man was somewhere lurking—that required a trifle more daring than I felt was at present mine.

I was about to turn away and summon outside assistance in evicting the intruder, when a sound from the rooms within halted me. The sound was a crashing chord struck on our piano, and it recalled my waning courage like the trumpeting of a battle-horn.

Of all the nerve! I thought, as I took a quick step nearer the door. It wasn't enough, I told myself as I noiselessly inserted my key in the lock and turned the handle, that the man had broken into our flat, but he must play our piano, as though to show how lightly he held the consequences of his ruthless act.

I would show him, I thought angrily, as I softly opened the door and stepped into the private hall of our apartment. I would tell him what I thought of his cheek, his effrontery, his impertinence, his unqualified gall. And then I would turn him out of the studio into the hands of the police.

I stood outside the closed door of our parlor, listening to the song the musical burglar sang as he played a rag-time accompaniment, to which the sudden chord he had struck was evidently an introduction. He played well, I noticed, and his voice was fairly musical.

"All I get here is much obli-i-iged to you!" he sang spiritedly.

"You'll get six months in jail, my friend, for coming in here!" I promised him viciously under my breath, as I waited outside the door, trying to nerve myself to enter the room and confront him.

The song ended. I listened in vain for a break in the silence that followed.

Then the thought suddenly struck me that he was packing up our valuables, stealthily robbing the parlor of its ornaments. Again the fierce rebellion against the despoiling of my home stirred me to action. I lost my fear, threw open the door determinedly, and stepped across the threshold.

The man in the gray overcoat was leaning over the front of the piano, studying on its top a photograph in a silver frame. As I paused in the doorway, he turned and looked at me; the picture—one of my own I had given to Grace—dropped clatteringly to the floor.

In silence he stared at me over the ruin of broken glass and twisted metal.

Full as were my eyes of contempt for the creature, there was still room in them to see, as I looked steadily at him, that he was vastly handsomer with his hat off. His hair waved back from a splendid brow, behind which, I thought, with a curling lip, was a brain only capable of earning a living for its body by house-breaking.

"I'm afraid I've spoiled this picture-frame," he remarked, not taking his eyes from my face, but indicating the wreck on the floor by a slight motion of his head. He smiled attractively. "I'm sorry for my clumsiness," he added, "but your unexpected appearance startled me."

My appearance had startled him! There was no cringing away from my accusing gaze; neither was any attempt made to intimidate me by threatened violence.

This burglar was probably of the new school, the gentleman-cracksman type. Evidently he was going to bluff it out until a means of escape from his predicament offered itself.

Very well, I thought, if that was his game I, too, would take a hand in it. I felt no fear of him.

"It is of no consequence," I answered coldly. "The picture has no value."

"I beg your pardon," he said quickly, his eyes still steadfastly on me. "It is a photograph of you? Then it is decidedly not valueless."

My face burned at his look and words; I could not doubt their meaning, and his insolence angered me.

"Perhaps you refer to the frame?" I replied evenly. "The silver is possibly worth something to you."

His eyes widened, and, in turn, he had the grace to blush. Stooping, he carefully picked up the bits of bent frame and broken glass from the floor.

"You must have fallen on lean days in your business," I remarked spitefully, as I watched his bowed back and lowered

head, "since you need bother to gather up such a trifling amount of silver."

He rose to his feet and laid the wreckage on top of the piano. As he dusted his hands he looked keenly at my face, while a slow smile curved his lips.

"Come!" he said cheerily. "You aren't going to cherish any ill-feeling against me because, in effigy, I 'threw you over' are you? I dropped your photograph quite by accident, I assure you!"

"I am more surprised at your clumsiness than anything else," I retorted, thinking of the neat manner in which he had forced open the studio door. "I should have thought you far too clever for such carelessness."

He was stung by the sarcasm in my voice, for I could see the muscles of his jaw tighten as he clenched his teeth firmly at my words. He turned and walked across the room.

"Since you find you cannot pardon my unintentional carelessness," he said, arriving at the mantelpiece, "I presume I had better go."

He reached up for the heavy onyx-and-gold clock over the fireplace, and brought it down in his arms. Could I believe my eyes? Was the man going to carry off our most sacred belonging under my very nose?

"Indeed you *had* better go!" I cried out, unsuccessfully struggling with a quaver of excitement in my voice, "but not with our clock!"

The man turned.

"But this is what I came for," he said, shifting its weight more comfortably in his arms. "And since I have it, I may as well leave at once."

The vandal actually admitted that the purpose of his visit to our apartment had been to steal our clock! And it was the one possession prized above all others by Grace and myself. Often we had told each other that it was the only worthwhile thing we owned. Its polished marble and gleaming gold, shedding its effulgence from the parlor-mantel, formed the *pièce de résistance* in the decoration of our home.

Was I to see it stolen before my very eyes—lost to us forever? Only over my lifeless body, I mentally determined, as I threw out my arms, barring the doorway with a hand on either casing.

"Oh, no!" I protested, while a nervous laugh shivered through my voice. "You can go, but the clock can't. You see it hasn't been going for a week, so it *can't* go!" I added hysterically.

The would-be abductor of our treasure rested the sacred timepiece on the piano-stool, and reached for his hat.

"I know," he said, not looking at me, "that's why I'm going to take it away—because it can't go itself."

My nails dug into the woodwork as I tightened my clutch on the door-jamb. I could feel an icy perspiration breaking out on my brow and in the palms of my hands; my eyes were wide and staring from the strangle-hold of fear that gripped my throat, as the man took a step toward me.

"You're not!" I cried. "You're not going to do any such thing!"

He looked up quickly, and his lips puckered in a slow whistle of surprise as he took in my barricade of the doorway. Then his chin hardened purposefully, and he picked up his loot.

"If you will let me pass—" he began, stepping forward.

"Stop!" I called.

The man paused and then backed away before me as I advanced slowly into the room, keeping my eyes fixed on his face. In the center of the parlor he stopped, and I came up until I stood directly before him.

"How dare you attempt to take away before my eyes—" I began.

"But, my dear young lady—" he interrupted.

"Stop!" I checked him, raising my hand. "Don't speak—this has gone far enough. Do you think that you can leave this room with that clock—"

"But I tell you—"

"You tell me!" I laughed scornfully. "You, a—"

I broke off suddenly, the word "burglar" dying in my throat at the sound of a light step behind me. I wheeled—to discover the alert figure of Grace poised in the doorway.

Just in time, I thought. Now there were two of us to handle this fellow. I would keep him in the room while my chum went down-stairs for a policeman.

"Grace—" I began, taking a quick step toward her.

Then I halted in surprise at the expression on her face. There was no wonder in her survey of the scene she had so suddenly come upon; no amazement at the unexpected sight of the strange man still standing in the center of the room. Why wasn't she astonished, awestruck, frightened at the spectacle?

"Hallo, kidlet!" she called to me. "Just got in, I see. Tom, have you met—"

Was I dreaming, or crazy, or—what could this mean? Besides taking the matter of my being alone in our home with a burglar as something quite ordinarily to be expected, she seemed to know the man—called him by his first name, in fact!

"Roberta," she addressed me, "let me introduce you to Tom Jennings. This is my chum, Miss Fletcher, Tom. For goodness' sake, what are you carrying that clock around in your hands for? You aren't going yet? Wait till I hang up my hat and coat, and we'll chat a while."

My roommate walked out into the hall. Mumbling an apology to the man in the gray overcoat, I dashed after her.

"Grace!" I gasped, pulling her into the dining-room and closing the door hastily after us. "What does this mean?"

"What does what mean, silly?" she asked surprisedly, staring at my wild eyes and flushed face.

"That man out there—who is he?" I panted. "Where did he come from—how did he get in here?"

"Why, Tom Jennings is an old, old friend of mine," Grace answered wonderingly. "His father's in the jewelry business—worth millions, by the way—and when I met Tom on the street the other day, and told him how badly our clock was keeping time, he offered to come up and take it down to his father's shop to be fixed. He called about fifteen minutes ago, but I had to go out after the salad I forgot to order, and I left him here to wait till I got back. Roberta—whatever is the matter?"

I was leaning helplessly against the table, all the strength sapped from my body in the reaction. I saw it all now—why had I been so stupid as not to understand the situation before?

The man I had seen entering our apartments had been admitted by Grace—who had returned earlier than I expected, and answered his ring which I had arrived too late to hear. Then, while I stood in our private hall outside the parlor door, my chum had slipped out through the back door that led to the elevators, leaving the stranger to be discovered alone in our rooms.

Between nervous laughter and hysterical tears, I explained the whole story to Grace, from my observation of the man in the street-car to the scene with him she had interrupted.

"And if you ever breathe to a soul—to him—" I finished in impressive warning.

"You crazy little Indian!" said my chum. "Do you think I'd spoil this budding romance? Why *you* are the girl Tom raved about after he came in here as a 'dream of ideal beauty he saw in the car'!"

"Then," I faltered happily, "then he noticed me, too?"

Grace laughed as she pushed me toward the parlor with a pat on the back.

"He did—so thoroughly that his description of you was astonishingly complete—for a man. Come on; let's go back and give him another look at you!"

"But—" I hesitated, my hand on the dining-room door, "think of the things I said to him about the silver in that

broken frame—and he's in the jewelry business!"

"Make him forget it," encouraged my chum. "Be nice to him. Come along!"

Together we entered the parlor. The man in the gray overcoat turned from the window and came toward us, with his hat in his hand. Grace advanced and took it from his unresisting fingers, as she pushed him into our easiest easy chair.

"You're going to stay to tea, Tom," she informed him, turning to the samovar on the little tabouret at his side. "So make yourself perfectly comfortable while the kettle boils."

"Well, really," he began, half protestingly, with a swift glance at me, "Miss Fletcher might object to my taking a cup 'before her very eyes—'"

I smiled back at him.

"Not at all," I answered. "I'll bring it to you myself, if you'll promise to display the cleverness I know you possess—and not drop it!"

A quick light grew in his eyes, and under its glow I felt my cheeks redden, but I looked bravely back. My pulses quickened. Then, with a little gasp of sudden gladness, I turned toward Grace, bending busily over the tea-things.

The man had not come into our home to rob, but he had stolen something there, just the same. And he was an ideal burglar.

WHEN THE SUN SETS.

WITH sheen of shining sails aslant
 They pass the harbor bar,
 To where the storm and stress of sea
 And wind's bravado are;
 For this is best, to brave and breast
 The sea, to strive and win,
 Nor be of those who lie at ease
 Protecting harbors in.

But ah, when sails are frayed and torn
 With strivings with the sea;
 'Tis good to seek again and find
 The shelter of the lee;
 And this is best, to ride and rest
 In peace along the shore,
 Nor be of those whom hungry seas
 Have gained to give no more!

Guy Wetmore Carryl.

The Name of Martin Hoffman.*

By STEPHEN BRANDISH,

Author of "Gordon's Getaway," "When Suspicion Struck Hard," "At the Mercy of the Unseen."

The astounding experience of a business man who thought all his troubles were over just as he was on the eve of the greatest calamity in his career.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MARTIN HOFFMAN, in charge of the Galpin Manufacturing Company during the absence of young Dick Galpin, finds the concern imperiled by the rival Dalton Company. He is in despair when Theobald Thomas, a former member of the firm, offers to take over its four-hundred-thousand-dollar debt. The papers must be signed by Hoffman on the next day, when the debt falls due.

A man named Gulick, of the Dalton Company, tries to bribe Hoffman to leave town until too late for this transaction. That evening, in his rooms, during a visit from George Wellingsford, vice-president of the rival firm, who offers him an increased bribe, Hoffman is suddenly stricken blind. Exhausted by strain and worry, and crazed with horror at his loss of sight, he hears, as in a dream, a number of men discussing his case. He is hurried off by them in an automobile to some house, where he is carried up-stairs and laid on a bed. He feels a sudden prick on his arm, and sinks into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

FIRST of all, the pillow was soft.

Hoffman felt over it with sleepy fingers. Yes, and so far as his capacity for judging went, the cover was fine linen. The bed, too, was distinctly soft and comfortable—even a little bit more comfortable than usual, if that were possible.

His head ached a trifle, to be sure, but that was to be expected. He had had a bad day yesterday, and to-day he was going to have a fine day—the biggest day in the history of the Galpin Company.

It must be about eight now. He'd doze for perhaps fifteen minutes more. Then he'd get up and have a cold plunge and a breakfast, and after that get to the office in time to meet Thomas, and settle up all details.

Oh, it was glorious! Exhilaration fairly surged through him; and still—what the dickens *had* happened last night?

Certainly something had gone wrong—radically wrong! He had a vague recollection of wild dreams—of an auto-

mobile ride—of doctors and judges and Heaven only knew what else! He remembered dreaming of raving and raising Cain generally and—

Well, it was over, and he must get up now. He rolled to his back and opened his eyes, and—there was nothing there!

His breath stopped! With a choke in his throat, he sat up and stared, or tried to stare, about him. Why, there was nothing in sight at all! So far as his eyes were concerned, they told of absolutely nothing save an increased lightness when he stared to the left—the direction from which the faintest of breezes was coming!

Then he must actually be blind! He gasped, and reached for the button beside his bed, the button by which, at times, he ordered breakfast. It was gone!

Instead of the tapestry paper, his fingers encountered a bare, painted stretch of wall; instead of the push-button, there was—paint!

Then it was all true! The whole affair which he had just imagined to be a dream was actual fact! He was blind!

An extremely soft footfall approached him, and a low, respectful voice said:

*Began April ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

"Will you have breakfast, sir?"

"What?" The blind man tried hard to look around.

"Breakfast, sir?"

Hoffman swallowed hard. His head was clear now—and thank God for the fact! He might have been mad last night; but his brain was working at present, and he felt fairly able to grapple with conditions, and:

"Will you kindly tell me who you happen to be?" he said slowly.

"Your special nurse, sir."

"And do I seem to need a special nurse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" remarked the treasurer of the Galpin Company pensively.

"Yes, sir!" said the voice placidly.

"Would you like a little steak, sir, or some eggs, or—"

The dazed man rubbed a hand over his sightless eyes. "For a long space he thought hard. Then:

"I am—somewhere outside of my home?" he inquired with difficulty.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, where?"

"In Dr. Coles's Sanatorium, sir."

"Eh?" Hoffman reflected further.

"Young man," he said, "I am blind. You know that?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, as nearly as I am able to judge, it happened only last night. Is this a place for the treatment of the blind?"

"Yes, sir."

He seemed to be assuming things with an amazing accuracy. He hazarded another query:

"I have been brought here to be treated for my eyes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, will you kindly tell me," went on Hoffman gently, "who the deuce had the assurance to take me away from home without my permission?"

"It was your brother, Mr. Hoffman," said the even voice.

"Did he give his name?"

"It was Mr. John Hoffman, sir," replied the attendant patiently.

The treasurer reflected deeply.

Certainly, it was a rather curious state of affairs—more particularly as his only

brother happened to bear the name of Richard and to be several hundred miles away. He took to rubbing his throbbing eyes again for a time, until:

"The doctor said most particularly that you must not rub your eyes, sir. He said that you might have breakfast and dress afterward, if you wished. After that, I think he will be up to see you, sir. What shall I bring?"

"What time is it?"

"Nearly noon, sir."

"Then," Hoffman pondered, "bring me a small steak and some hot rolls and some potatoes and a couple of cups of coffee. That's enough."

"Very well, sir."

The shuffling footsteps departed as quietly as they had arrived.

For an instant there seemed to be a whispered consultation somewhere in the neighborhood; then silence fell, and the blind man sank back and waited.

John Hoffman—his brother who had never existed! Dr. Coles's Sanatorium, of which he had never heard. What the dickens did it all mean, anyway?

Ten minutes of hard thought, and he had found but one definite conclusion; it was past ten in the morning, and he was not at the office! That solitary fact coursed on and on through his head.

He hadn't been on hand to sign the notes for Thomas and keep the old firm above water. There were three more days, to be sure; but he very much preferred not to use them.

He thought on and on—and finally breakfast came.

It was as delicate and delicious a meal as skill could produce; its extreme excellence, in fact, astounded the patient. He felt and ate his way through it rapidly, though; and at the end, as the fingers of the attendant ceased piloting his own, and the tray was removed, he came to the subject uppermost in his mind with:

"See here, you—what's your name?"

"Smith, sir."

"All right, Smith; I want to dress and get out of this."

"You may dress, sir—indeed, your clothes are here. But I don't think the doctor would allow you out, sir."

"Well, the doctor hasn't anything to say about it in this case," Hoffman re-

sponded serenely. "I've got to get down to my office for half an hour at least, and you've got to steer me there."

"The doctor would never hear to it, sir. He gave the strictest orders that you were to be kept absolutely quiet."

"Then I'm afraid his orders are going to be disobeyed," the patient remarked. "Where are my clothes?"

In silence the man brought them, and for the first time in his adult life the treasurer of the Galpin Company was forced to allow himself to be dressed from top to toe.

The process was completed at last, and he stretched himself. He was still rather tired and stiff; he was also stone-blind; but his head seemed to be in good shape again—and he had never heard of a law barring a blind man from business transactions.

"We'll start now," he announced calmly. "Can you get an automobile?"

"The doctor said very positively just now, sir, that you must not go out for a day or two."

"Send him here, then!" Hoffman commanded sharply.

"He's just gone out for several hours, sir."

"Then let me ask you whether twenty dollars would bribe you to take me downtown for an hour."

"It wouldn't, sir. It would cost me my job," said the voice in rather sorrowful monotony. "And you couldn't do anything without an attendant, sir," it went on soothingly again. "You'd have to have somebody with you, sir, and there's nobody here would dare go for twenty, or fifty, for that matter. You'd better sit down, sir."

The man was right—eminently right! The hard fact struck Hoffman after the manner of a blow. Everything else out of the question, he couldn't navigate alone just yet under his new conditions.

"Yes, I'd have to have an attendant, fast enough!" he muttered bitterly. "But why the dickens *can't* I have an attendant and—"

"The doctor said that, in these cases of temporary paralysis of the optic nerve, absolute quiet was the first requirement, sir," the attendant assured him. "You'd better sit down in the big chair, sir, and I'll read to you, if you

like. Just forget business altogether, sir, and you'll be at it again in a few days, and as well as ever!"

There was a compelling monotony about that voice. Hoffman began to walk, in the weak shuffle he seemed to have acquired, and quick hands caught him and steered him to a thickly upholstered chair.

He dropped into it with a disappointed grunt.

"Look here, Smith," he said with what was intended for a friendly tone, "where is this joint?"

"Up-town, sir."

"Whereabouts?"

"Oh, well up-town, sir. Shall I read—"

"Wait a minute. I want to ask you a few questions first. You're sure my brother brought me here?"

"Why, yes, sir. With a couple of doctors. You were in a bad state last night—very much overwrought and overworked, sir. Now, this novel—"

Hoffman sighed resignedly.

"Go on!" he said. "Thank you."

The man might as well be reading a novel as doing anything else that came within his range as special nurse. Furthermore, it would give Hoffman time to meditate in peace, and decide what was best to do under the circumstances.

The story began. It was a late production in fiction, and the patient thanked his stars that he had read it, for now he could pick up the tale at any desired point and offer sane comments. He sat back with a fair counterfeit of a contented sigh, and smiled vaguely as he tried to assort the varied occurrences of the last twelve hours.

First of all, velvet-gloved effects to the contrary, he was being detained somewhere against his will. There was no question whatever but that he must stay where he was until he devised fitting means of leaving.

It might be a sanatorium for the blind; it might be anything else. Just at present, he was in no position to say what it was, or to make any definite hypothesis upon the matter—save that one intention to get out.

Secondly, some one must have brought him here—and some one masquerading as a brother of his. That last, of course,

was absolute nonsense. Richard was South, and he was the only brother Hoffman had ever owned.

And it was only yesterday morning, by the way, that Martin had had a letter from him, regretting that the end of the week would have to see him homeward bound.

No, Richard was altogether out of the whole proposition. Some one else had elected himself brother of Martin Hoffman, and had succeeded in putting him in this place—whatever eventually it might turn out to be. Some one else and—yes, some one who understood the various business matters that were impending, and wished to have him out of the way!

That much seemed reasonably clear, in view of certain sums that had been offered for his disappearance. That was it! He had been put—somewhere!

Now, to find out where "somewhere" happened to be, and to get back to the hotel and the office and see a doctor and find out exactly what ailed his poor eyes, and how long it was going to take to remedy the trouble, after the Thomas business had been settled.

And for a beginning—

"She stood, momentarily, sweeping him with a cold scorn, and—'Eh? Are you sleepy, sir?'" asked the voice of his attendant.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'm pretty tired, Smith!" Hoffman responded with a hearty frankness, as a fresh idea came suddenly. "I'm going to lie down. Suppose you come over and sit by me and go on."

"Very well, sir." There was a certain relief in the attendant's voice as he steered Hoffman gently from the chair.

The short transit concluded, the blind man stretched out luxuriously as a blanket was laid over him. With the quickening sense of hearing that seemed to develop more markedly every minute, he knew that the man was taking a chair beside him and opening the book again—and the story went on.

And on, and on, until Hoffman found himself, all things notwithstanding, very near a doze. He caught himself, and was wide-awake again and acute in every sense save that of sight.

The attendant was watching him, as

the droning tone denoted. He would play his part as nicely as possible. The sightless eyes closed again, and his breathing gradually became slow and regular. He grunted softly, and huddled down more cozily under the blanket—and, to all outward appearances, he was asleep.

Features peaceful and expressionless, he waited patiently. The reading ceased, and there was an expectant pause. Hoffman permitted an artistic snore to escape him. The wait grew longer; and at last came a soft:

"Mr. Hoffman!"

A long, sibilant breath was the only answer.

"Mr. Hoffman!"

The snore came again. And it seemed to have been a well-judged snore, for the attendant muttered:

"Sleeping again, thank God! Well—"

There was the sound of a chair being pushed back softly. The blanket about him was tucked in more securely, and the light steps crossed—toward the door, as it seemed, for there was the slightest creak of a knob—and in an indistinct way the man on the bed knew that, for the time, he was alone.

For all of ten minutes he remained motionless; then, as matters seemed permanently soundless, he essayed a soft:

"Smith!"

There was no answer. He waited a minute, and tried again:

"Smith!"

And Smith, it appeared, had left the room. On the instant, Hoffman thrust one leg from under the covers—and then the other—and there was no reproving voice.

He cast off the blanket and stood erect, and no one filed an objection. Erect, he waited, listening. No sound greeted his ear.

So that the time appeared ripe for a tour of investigation—a tour which, if successful, might land him in the street. And once there, lack of hat and overcoat notwithstanding, he could find some one, any one, who would tell him where the cars were and how to get back to his home and—

He must not delay. Blind and strange to the place, and not altogether steady he might be, but he must make the

best haste possible and find the way to freedom before any further interference came.

Hands outstretched, he started forward hastily. In a fairly definite way, he knew the direction in which his attendant had gone; he followed it as swiftly as possible, and—

Yes, here was a wall. Here, too, was some sort of woodwork and—ah! here was a door.

He found the knob and turned it, and walked—into a closet! He backed out quickly and searched on, and in a very few seconds he had found another door, and was seeking the knob.

An extremely queer sense of greater space impressed him as he passed through. Inquisitive fingers, reaching and waving through the air, met a banister railing, and he knew that he was in a corridor, and probably at the edge of the stair-well. He retreated to the wall opposite, and felt his way along cautiously again.

A full dozen feet of progress—and he had found another door. He reached to the left again, and learned that he was at the turning-point of the banisters. That, it seemed, must mean the head of the stairs.

Logically, they should lead to the main corridor below. He dared not try them. He'd make a trip through this doorway to the right, if it happened to be unlocked, and see what was concealed. Perhaps another, and more acclimated, blind man was there who could tell him the way out.

Perhaps—excited hope surged through him as he tried the fastening. Exultation succeeded suddenly as the door gave way before his hand and opened without a sound.

Little idea as he had of his whereabouts, he was at least going somewhere, and the path might lead to the outer world and—

Out of the limitless blackness there came a sound of some one stirring. There was a muffled exclamation; the sound, then, of a sudden fall, as if some one had thrown himself prostrate upon the carpeted floor.

And then a strange voice rose, deep, but querulous, in reverent and respectful tones, with:

"It is indeed the king! It is indeed the wise one! Bow low, ye people! All hail, King Solomon!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN REGARD TO CLUES.

THE day-clerk, as Richard Hoffman observed without much interest, stared a little as the two bell-boys hurried to the elevators with the hand-baggage.

Furthermore, the day-clerk observed: "Too bad, sir, that you were forced to return so soon. I'm very sorry, sir!"

"Well, you needn't cry about it, Dickson!" Mr. Richard Hoffman commented, as he hurried by with his wife. "These things are bound to happen, you know, one time and another."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. It's always well to be prepared for them, as it were, and to try to take them philosophically, Mr. Hoffman," the day-clerk murmured, as the elevator-gate closed for its trip to Suite 501.

It was in Suite 501, some seven or eight minutes later, that the peculiar tone worked into the elder Hoffman's mind and set him wondering.

"What in blazes was the matter with Dickson, Madge?" he inquired thoughtfully.

"What, dear?"

"He talked as if I'd just lost a leg or something, instead of merely being called back unexpectedly by business," Richard went on.

His wife laughed.

"Probably Dickson knew how much you'd been counting on a winter vacation," she said.

"But still—" He paused. "I must be getting imaginative!" Hoffman finished, with a laugh. "I guess the long face made an impression on Dickson. Blast it! I *didn't* want to come back!"

"Never mind." The maid had bustled in, and fluffy things and things that rustled and other things that swished and crackled were being laid out from the trunks and the grips—and, for the time, Richard Hoffman was a quantity ignored.

He intruded again shortly with:

"I wonder how poor old Martin's getting on down-town?"

"Er—what, dear?"

"I say, I wonder whether Martin's going to weather the storm for the Galpin outfit?" the brother mused. "I doubt it like the dickens!"

There was no answer. Martin had been too thoroughly discussed, and his prospects in the last few weeks had been too gloomy, to allow of much speculation.

"I'm going to call him up and surprise him!" Richard Hoffman announced.

He walked to the telephone and asked for the Galpin Company's number. He waited a little, and suddenly asked to be connected with Mr. Martin Hoffman's office, and:

"Mr. Hoffman is not here to-day!" the company's Central informed him.

"Eh?"

"No, sir. He hasn't been down."

"Are you *sure*?" Richard swallowed a little.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, send some one to Mr. Stound and ask again."

He waited once more; and presently he caught his breath.

"Mr. Stound says that he isn't there, and that it is the first time in twenty years he hasn't been on hand before nine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then—well, leave word for him that his brother called up, if he should happen to come in within the next hour. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to his wife with somewhat startled eyes.

"Mart isn't down at the office," he announced, "and they haven't had any word from him. I—hang it! He must be ill! I'm going to see."

He shot out of the suite and to that other floor where Martin Hoffman abode. He was back in a matter of five minutes with new information.

"The room-maid says Martin wasn't there last night, and that his bed hasn't been disturbed!" he announced rather wildly.

"Well, he may have taken a notion to go off somewhere for a little relaxation," his wife said gently. "He certainly needs it badly enough, dear."

"Maybe he does, but Martin never

went off at such a time as this unless some one chloroformed him!" replied Martin's brother. "I'm going down to the office and find out what struck him!"

The elevator, within a very few seconds, landed him before the desk of the hotel, and Mr. Hoffman, the elder, came straight to the point with:

"Was my brother here last night, Dickson?"

The clerk stared, open-mouthed.

"Why—er—yes, sir."

"Well, where is he now?"

"I can't tell that, Mr. Hoffman."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know."

The elder brother did a little staring himself.

"Well, have you gone crazy, Dickson, or have I?" he inquired. "What the deuce became of Martin? He hasn't left on a wild carouse, has he? You didn't notice any signs of intoxication or—"

"Certainly not, sir; but—"

Inexplicable emotion seemed to have choked the clerk.

"Well, *what*?" the inquirer demanded rather violently. "What in thunder has happened here, anyway?"

"If you will just step inside, sir," suggested the clerk with a studied, gentle compassion.

Hoffman went through the gate briskly, and took a chair to the rear of the enclosure, beside the big safe. The clerk, with a final glance about the deserted lobby, followed him, and dragged another to his side.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Hoffman," he said very earnestly, "that you are not here before you were due because they sent for you?"

"They?"

"Why, the gentlemen, of course. Your brother, and the rest."

"I certainly haven't heard from Martin—that is, in any spectacular way such as you seem to suggest."

"Not your brother Martin, sir. Your brother John."

Mr. Richard Hoffman stared at him for a full minute; then his summary came forth with a characteristic and cheerful frankness.

"You let it alone, Dickson—the

booze or the pills or the pipe, or whatever it is," he remarked soothingly. "I thought you looked funny when we first came in. I never owned a brother by name of John, my boy. You—"

"But your brother John was here last night! He was the one who took your other brother away, sir!"

"Took him *where*?"

"That's more than I can say. There were a number of gentlemen up-stairs. There was one they called 'Judge,' sir, and three or four that they called 'Doctor,' and then—"

"And then?" cut in Richard with dazed patience.

"And then they all went away together in one of those taximeter automobiles, and Mr. Martin has not been back since, nor any of the rest of them!"

The elder Hoffman licked his lips.

"Dickson, is this *straight*?" he inquired.

"It's just as the night-clerk told me, sir. I'm sure he wasn't mistaken."

"And my brother was *taken away* last night?"

"Yes, sir; and the night-man said that he didn't seem himself at all. He said he was talking very wildly, and saying that he was blind, and that he made a good deal of resistance when they put him in the machine."

"Yes, I'll bet he did, if he didn't want to go, but— Oh, see here! This is all too darned absurd. Where did the cab come from?"

"The stand right across the way, sir. I heard them call it just before I went off my watch."

"And where did they tell it to go?"

"I haven't any idea of that, sir. The only thing I know is that your brother is gone, and that we haven't heard a word of him since."

The elder man reflected for perhaps a minute. Then he rose suddenly and shot through the gate and across the looby and out of the hotel.

Very abruptly it had been borne in upon him that something distinctly unusual had happened to Martin, and he had decided to delve into the mystery at once.

He made for the cab-stand, and was greeted with enthusiasm by the man next

in line. Experience suggested a gentle bribe. Hoffman thrust a small bill into the person's hand and came straight to business, with:

"Were you on duty here last night?"

"No, sir."

"Well, do you know who was?"

"No, sir; but I know they ain't now," grinned the metered chauffeur.

"Why not?"

"Because the whole seven that was on here last night was fired when they brought back their cars. They'd been fixing the taximeters, sir," finished the driver.

"Are you sure of that?" Hoffman asked, rather breathlessly.

"It's the talk o' the whole bunch, sir."

"Then—"

The inquirer turned suddenly and hurried away. In the cigar-store on the opposite corner there was a telephone-booth, and he made for it and looked up the number of the cab company.

He had the connection very shortly, and the superintendent of the establishment as well—and he learned nothing.

The man had been quite right. The whole seven at that particular station had been discharged on their return last evening. No, the superintendent did not know the address of one of them, or where they had been during the night, for that matter.

He knew only that they seemed to have been a downright bad lot, and that this company proposed to maintain honest rates, and that any member of the employed force who sought to violate rules would be discharged on the instant his derelictions were discovered.

The elder Hoffman hung up the receiver wearily.

His brother had been carried off in an unknown cab by an unknown collection of men to an unknown place!

It was absurd! It was outrageous! It was, furthermore, incredible; for, in the present crisis of the Galpin affairs, Martin would no more have thought of deserting business than he would have essayed a flight through the air; and—Hoffman took up the telephone once more, and called up his wife, across the street, and informed her that he was bound for the Galpin office.

Over the Galpin establishment a sort of dazed calm seemed to rest. He asked the boy at the door where Mr. Hoffman could be found; he was informed that Mr. Hoffman had not been down to business that day, but that he could see Mr. Stound. The infant blinked confusedly—and the elder Hoffman walked to the back of the store and straight through the "Private" treasurer's door.

The place was just as he had left it, a month or two ago, save that the desk was closed and that there was a pile of unopened personal letters on the out-drawn arm-rest.

With a grunt, he settled into Martin's own chair and stared about—until his eye lit upon the button which was connected with Stound's office. On the impulse, he leaned forward and pressed it.

Steps came with a rush. Formality forgotten, the door was burst open suddenly; and Stound, with a remarkable change of expression, was standing before him and muttering:

"God bless me, sir! I thought it was your brother, sir! I—Dear me!"

"Where is my brother, Stound?" Hoffman demanded.

"Well, I—he's not here, sir. I've—been expecting him every minute this blessed day, sir, and it's getting late in the afternoon now, and there ain't a sign of him."

"Where's he gone, then?" The elder Hoffman leaned forward earnestly. "Certainly, you'd know, if any one did, Stound. Was there any business to take him out of town?"

"No, sir." The old man looked at the floor.

"Wasn't he well, then?"

"He seemed so."

"Well, did he seem *at all* indisposed yesterday?"

"He—he seemed a bit tired out, sir, and no wonder. That's all I know."

The visitor studied him with very deep interest for rather more than a minute. Then he straightened up, with:

"My dear Stound, this isn't a melodrama, you know. You needn't stand there with that long face and work your fingers and snort under your beard, as if you were concealing state secrets. If you've got anything to tell, or anything to suggest—out with it!"

The old man started. A trifling hesitation, and he closed the door and turned to the visitor.

"God help me, sir!" he said fervently. "You'll forgive me before I say it—but, somehow, it seems to be my duty, sir."

"Eh?"

"Yesterday, sir, a gentleman came here and said that he'd loan the company money enough to carry it through the trouble, sir—you know all about that."

"Yes."

"And after he'd gone," the manager hurried on, "another gentleman came, and he said that if Mr. Hoffman—your brother—wouldn't be here to sign the necessary papers, he'd give him fifteen thousand dollars in cash; to disappear for a week, that is."

"And?"

"And I understand your brother had him kicked out of the place, sir!"

"Which was thoroughly like him!" the elder Hoffman commented. "How d'you happen to know all about it?"

"Well, to tell the truth, sir, I was listening at the door, for just a minute."

"And this morning, when my brother didn't turn up, you concluded immediately that he had met the other man outside and closed with the offer?"

"Heaven forbid, sir! I—"

"All right. I'll take your word for it. Now, what do you know about his whereabouts at present?"

"No more than I do about where I'll be myself a hundred years from now, sir!"

The visitor considered again; and when he looked up, it was with a rather hard smile.

"It's apparent that my ordinarily well-balanced brother has elected to drop out of sight altogether for the time!" he observed. "Just tell that telephone Central of yours to give me Delafield's Detective Agency, and get Mr. Howard Delafield on the wire!"

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THREE DOORS.

For the moment, Martin Hoffman stood transfixed with amazement.

For the moment, too, a little chill ran through him, and his head began to feel a trifle doubtful; and then, out of the blackness before him, the voice came again, intoning:

"Wonderful and mighty king! We hail thee!"

The blind man stopped short. It was a joke of some sort; doubtless a joke perpetrated by some one who didn't realize that he was sightless.

"Pardon me," he said with a faint smile, "but I'm not just the subject for a practical joke. I am stone-blind."

"All hail, King Solomon!" the voice went on impressively.

The wanderer moistened his lips.

"Am I supposed to be King Solomon?" he inquired mildly.

"Great king, the nations of the earth bow down before thee!" the voice went on monotonously. "See, majesty, I beat my head upon the ground before thee! I call aloud—"

"Then please stop calling aloud!" Hoffman said rather sharply. "I'm blind, I tell you. Whatever the idea is, please give it up. I can't see it or you, and I can't appreciate it at all. Where are you, anyway?"

"Lo, king, I lie before thee!"

"Then, please, get up, drop your con-founded farce, and tell me the way out of this place. I want to get a breath of air and—"

A sharp intake of breath greeted him, and a horrified:

"Oh, incomparable Solomon, thus would you leave even the humblest of your subjects in this the first moment that you have appeared through all the centuries! Thus must I be cast back into the unhallowed gloom, endured for so many years before your coming? Thus must I—"

"I—"

"For I have indeed waited long and patiently, lord!" the voice continued to plead. "I have waited and prayed that you might return and reveal yourself! And now you have at last deigned to come, and you would go as quickly! Ah, no! Lord, I beseech thee that—"

"Shut up!" cut in Hoffman rather inelegantly.

The voice had risen altogether too high for complete comfort, and Hoffman

expected every moment to hear the sound of footsteps in the corridor. Instead, a dismal wail answered him with:

"Lo, king, I obey; though my heart turn to ashes, and be melted in the bitterness of ages! My voice is dead! My lips are as stone!"

"Then let them stay so for a while!" snapped the blind man. "I'm frank to admit that I don't see the point of it; and, if it's supposed to be a joke, it's deuced bad taste, to say the very least. But, if you're not going to get up and pilot me out of here, for Heaven's sake have sense enough not to raise that row!"

He seemed to have been taken literally!

From the room before him came never a sound, save the groans of some one, apparently near the floor.

For an endless space, as it seemed, Hoffman waited for further developments.

None, apparently, were to come, for silence reigned—and presently the chilly sensations began to run up and down his backbone once more.

There was something uncanny about all this—something too uncanny for endurance, in his present state. He wanted to get out of the place; he wanted to get down-town to his office; he wanted to find Thomas by telephone, and have him back and have the deal closed before the end of the day's banking hours. He wanted to see the Ridgkin people considerably before three, and have matters settled in full.

And he turned abruptly to the spot where the door must be. In a happy instant he found it, and felt his way through.

He stepped into the corridor quickly, and drew the door closed; and a sorrowful voice floated after with:

"Great and merciless majesty! The humblest of thy servants awaits, with chastened spirit, thy next coming! Though my spirit groan and my heart bleed; though the ages come and go, and nations rise and fall again, still will I—"

The door snapped sharply, and the sound was deadened to a wordless muttering.

Hoffman drew a great breath, and pressed a hand to his eyes.

Was he crazy, or was that other individual? Or was it all an extremely poor joke, perpetrated by some convalescent of the place?

For the instant, his over-tried brain took to its tricks of unsteadiness again, and he was unable to determine definitely. With something of an effort, he threw off the recollection of the whole affair as far as possible.

It was time for him to go on and find his way out, even if he had to attempt the descent of a fire-escape in the darkness that surrounded him!

He'd do it, too, and take his chances; and—there was another door at his hand.

For a little, he felt over it. It was much like the former; perhaps it would lead to nothing whatever; perhaps it was the exit to a rear stairway—or something of the sort.

He felt on and on, and his hand encountered a bolt on the hall side of the door. Hoffman started joyfully; this looked promising. The entrance to a stairway, perhaps, or—he slid back the bolt and tried the door.

It opened with beautiful ease. The wanderer thrust one foot forward and felt his way. The floor was entirely solid. He advanced another yard, and found only level carpet. He tried again, and felt about with his arms; he seemed to be in another room now.

Confusedly, cursing his blindness, he felt farther to either side. There was nothing solid to be encountered. Well, he'd turn around and get out, and look further for escape; and—

"It is certainly high time you turned up, Dansten!" said a thin, cracked voice, some few feet before him.

The blind man stopped short.

"What?"

"I say, it's certainly high time that you put in an appearance, Dansten!" the sharp tones repeated. "Why haven't you been here before? What?"

Hoffman choked down the amazed question that was in his throat. There was something here altogether beyond his understanding, for the present.

He'd have to take these little pleasantries in the spirit in which they were advanced, whatever that might be. He tried to smile; and a vague flicker of mirth came over his lips.

"I—er—was delayed!" he announced shakily.

"Delayed, were you? Humph!" The voice seemed to have grown more irascible; and the visitor catalogued it suddenly as that of a rather elderly man. "Well, you're here now, anyway. I hope you've come for business?"

"I—er—yes!"

"I—er—yes!" quoted the unseen. "Hades! Your father never wobbled around with any 'I—er—yes!' my boy. He was a man that knew the law business from one end to the other!"

"Of course!" assented Hoffman dazedly.

"And you'll be like him, all in due time," the thin voice continued, with a little kindlier accent. "Sit down!"

"If—if you'll show me a chair?" suggested the visitor. "I'm blind."

"Blind?" The voice rose to an astounded scream. Pattering footsteps came toward Hoffman, and he felt that some one was staring at him. "Well, I'll be hanged, boy! Here, sit here! Now! Gently! That's right. Down there!"

Thin fingers clutched the visitor's arms, and he was lowered into a comfortable armchair. For a minute or so he waited expectantly; then, with a creaking of a willow chair somewhere across the room, he heard:

"You haven't brought the papers, of course?"

"Why—no!"

"I thought not. I thought not. I thought not. You're so devilish undependable, Horace. Your father would have had them with him; and all made out in proper form—and after my waiting all these months to see you, too! Well—bah!"

Hoffman moistened his lips, and tried to smile again.

"You—er—see, it was unavoidable this time," he explained thickly. "I—"

"Unavoidable! Unavoidable! Why should you allow anything unavoidable to enter into a case as important as mine?" the person demanded. "Don't you know, Horace—don't you know positively—that just as soon as we put my claim before any judge, the whole ninety-seven millions are going to be awarded to me by the courts? Don't you know

that I am going to give you personally forty millions in cash, as soon as we get the decision? Don't you understand that you're not working for nothing, even if my relatives have brought me here to Italy and shut me up in this confounded villa? What?"

"Of course!" Hoffman agreed.

"Then why don't you collect the money?" the voice rasped. "Why do you come around here and tell me you haven't the papers ready? Why do you boggle everything, and try to excuse yourself, and all that sort of rot?"

"Well, I—"

"Look here!" The voice grew angrier. "I'll tell you one thing that'll bring a blush to your cheeks! Yesterday a man came in here—a colored man—one of the servants of the palace, or whatever it is. He came in here merely to sweep, mind you! I looked at him, and I saw that he was intelligent. I explained the whole matter to him, and asked him if he could attend to it, and if he would. He agreed. Then I gave him five cents, for a retainer, and he said he would attend to everything! He said he'd go to America at once, and be back here with the money inside of two days, just as I asked him! *There!* What do you think of *that*? And you supposed to be one of the leading lawyers in New York! Bah!"

With a gasp, Hoffman was on his feet.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said swiftly, and rather chokingly. "I'll go straight back and get the papers, and have you sign them; and I'll have the money here for you before that colored man possibly can. Is that satisfactory?"

He turned toward the door and felt his way. A thin hand came down on his shoulder and patted it—and a new series of chills ran through Hoffman, as a gratefully lachrymose voice squeaked into his ear:

"Spoken like your father, my boy! Spoken like your father! Now you're beginning to talk business! Go and get my air-ship! It's tied to the left-hand chimney on the roof. Tell the engineer to take you straight to Trinity Church, New York, and—good-by, my boy!"

The treasurer of the Galpin Company was through the door, and had closed

it after him. With fingers that were growing in intelligence by the second, he found the bolt, and jammed it back into place—and, for an instant, he stood and breathed hard.

That poor devil was as mad as a March hare! About that last fact there could be never the shade of a doubt.

And the realization gave biting point to another horrible suspicion that had been floating through his mind for some five minutes. *Was he in a lunatic asylum?*

On the face of it, it seemed incredible; and yet—well, there were people in the place altogether too queer for comfortable association; and he must get out and find his way home, and—ah!

Here was another and smaller door! He felt about it carefully. He felt farther, and found what seemed to be a turn in the hall, or a solid wall.

At all events, this door was considerably narrower; and—yes, it was bolted, too. *This* must be the back stairway; and perhaps it led to the street; and perhaps he could—

He shoved back the bolt and tried the third knob. It gave way; and, hands outstretched once more, he hurried forward into the endless, purposeless space before his blind eyes.

A dozen feet, and Hoffman leaped back instinctively; for, out of the gloom, had issued a wild, animal-like snarl!

For all resemblance to human sound, it might have been a tiger or a lion! On the other hand, there was a queer, savage quality that resembled a demented man's voice; and—Hoffman was flat upon the floor!

Strong, wiry hands, following the crash of a chair or a table, had gripped him so suddenly, that resistance was out of the question. Not altogether ignorant of wrestling, he let go of his muscles, and landed without a bruise—and, as swiftly, he had bounced back to his feet, and was reaching wildly around in the darkness.

The snarl came again, and with it a rushing of light feet. The hands followed, too, and all but had his throat again; and the treasurer of the Galpin Company found himself engaged, on the second, in furious conflict.

At the mildest, it was a wild sort of

business, and one in which, palpably, he must fight or be thrashed—and perhaps killed. He caught himself in a wild desire to scream for help, and put all his mind to fighting the unseen thing that was straining at him.

Silently, pantingly, they gripped hard. The other's fingers slipped, and came again to Hoffman's neck. He caught at the wrists, and secured them with wonderful alertness. He forced them down and back; he managed even, by releasing the one, to turn the other very suddenly behind his demented antagonist's back.

He shut his teeth, and thrust out a leg—and the invisible fighter was down upon his face for the moment, and struggling like a wild man. He was rising, too, despite the well-held "hammerlock"; in just a minute, if he maintained his strength, he was going to be on top of Hoffman, with every prospect of choking him to death.

And indeed, what with years of desk work, Hoffman felt himself giving out rapidly, and—the door crashed back to the wall, and other steps were racing toward the strugglers!

There was an instant of furious panting. There was a sudden, tremendous relief, as the form was dragged away from him.

There was an abrupt jerk, as Hoffman was yanked bodily to his feet by two pairs of hands and raced forward.

And they were apparently out in the corridor now—and now they were tearing along the hall—and now he was hurled headlong upon a bed, and hands were holding him down.

He tried to protest. His voice choked for an instant; and then, before he could speak, the no longer gentle tones of Smith growled breathlessly into his ear:

"The next time you try that trick, you'll get your skull cracked—hear that?"

"Say, for a blind man's home—" came in a roar from Hoffman.

"This—ain't any blind man's home, Bill!" the snarl informed him viciously. "This is Dr. Blatchford's private asylum for the insane—and, if you ain't less buggy hereafter, you'll get a jab of morphine that'll make you think you've dropped into the Atlantic! Lie down there!"

(To be continued.)

WHEN THE CLOCK STOPS.

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

How the inventor with a grudge got even with those who had turned the cold shoulder to him.

ELIHU BROOKS, inventor, stormed furiously around the private office of the president of the Acme Air-Brake Company.

"Whose invention put you where you are?" he demanded.

"Yours," admitted the president with an air of patient resignation.

"And you've made over a million out of it, ain't you?"

"Something around that figure, I believe," the president again admitted.

"Well, then, it seems mighty curious that you can't invest five thousand in my top. Why, sir, it is the most remarkable top ever invented. Spins for two hours.

Did you ever hear of a top that would spin for two hours? You never did. If I can get that top on the market it will sell like hot cakes. Every man, woman, and child in the world will want one, and they will retail at a dollar each, too. Seems to me that in view of the fact that I made your old company what it is you might finance this thing for me."

"But, Mr. Brooks," the president gently remonstrated, "we bought your patent outright and paid you cash for it. I can't see where we are under any obligations to you. Your top may be a good thing, but it doesn't look practical to me. I don't believe you can get anybody

to invest a dollar in a toy just because it will spin for two hours. Who wants to see a top spin for two hours? Your proposition is altogether too foolish for my consideration, and, as I am very busy just now, I will bid you good morning."

Without a word Mr. Brooks snatched up his top from the desk and stalked angrily from the office.

In turn he visited the offices of the New Process Brass Company, the Briggs Fire Appliance Company, the Gauss Automobile Brake Company, and half a dozen other concerns, in a fruitless endeavor to raise funds to finance his top.

At all of these places he was received with due respect, for, indeed, it was to the products of his fertile brain that each of them owed its existence. However, none of them could see their way clear to invest five thousand dollars in Mr. Brooks's top.

"Then I'll finance it myself," he said angrily as he strode out of the last office. "I know it's a winner, and I'll make a fortune out of it; you see if I don't."

Now, Mr. Brooks, lacking the instinct that makes men successful in a business way, had never before attempted to finance one of his inventions, but had always been satisfied to sell his patents outright for cash. The products of his genius had made millions for other men, but the inventor himself was in comparatively poor circumstances.

True, he owned a beautiful home, surrounded by spacious grounds, the value of which was estimated at not less than thirty thousand dollars. He also owned a large store-building on the main street of the town, but as this had stood empty for several years it brought him no income. Outside of these he was practically penniless.

Nevertheless, with absolute confidence in the success of his enterprise, Mr. Brooks mortgaged his home for five thousand dollars, installed the necessary machinery in his empty store-building, employed several helpers, and set about manufacturing tops.

At the end of two months the inventor had ten thousand tops finished, boxed, and ready for shipment, and had used up the entire five thousand dollars. Then he suddenly discovered that he had made

no provisions for advertising and marketing his stock.

Reluctant to further mortgage his home, he again made a round of his friends in a fruitless endeavor to raise funds. As before, they received him kindly, but they were all of the private opinion that the old gentleman had become weak-minded in his old age, and they declined to risk a dollar in his enterprise, whereat the irate inventor vowed dire vengeance on all of them, and prepared to plaster another mortgage on his home.

Before he could do this, however, Mr. Brooks was taken suddenly and seriously ill.

*When Dr. Harmon arrived and examined the old gentleman he looked very grave, and sent a messenger for Drs. Evans and Grant.

After a thorough examination, and a long private consultation in the next room, the physician returned and informed the patient that he was afflicted with an incurable disease, and had less than a month to live.

Mr. Brooks was at first stunned by this intelligence, but the philosophy of the genius was his, and he quickly became reconciled to his fate and set about preparing for the end, with the same cool deliberation that had marked all his actions throughout his career. He expressed but one regret—that he could not live long enough to get even with the men who had grown rich through his inventions, and had refused him aid in his hour of need.

For a week he did little except lie quietly, apparently buried in deep thought and contemplation. Then, one day his housekeeper heard him calling excitedly. When she reached his side she found the old gentleman sitting up in bed, his face filled with elation.

"I've got 'em!" he cried exultantly. "I've got 'em!"

"For the land's sake!" gasped the good woman. "You've got what?"

"Them," answered the inventor enigmatically. "I want you to send for Lawyer Patterson right off. I'm going to make my will."

"Humph!" sniffed the housekeeper. "I can't see why you should make such a

fuss over that. I thought you were having a fit," and she flounced indignantly from the room.

Mr. Patterson arrived shortly afterward, and remained closeted with his client for three hours. The housekeeper was called in once to witness the signing of the will, and then dismissed again; and when the lawyer finally emerged from the room he had a number of papers in his hand, and a grim, sardonic smile on his countenance.

He appeared to be much amused over something, but made no comments.

And the next day Elihu Brooks died.

II.

WHEN the contents of the will were made public, everybody in Ceresco sat up and wondered. It was a most remarkable will. Those who had suspicioned that the old inventor's mind had become weakened before his death were now convinced that they had made a correct surmise.

Clyde Brooks, a young grocery clerk of the town, nephew and only surviving relative of the inventor, was made the sole heir, with certain restrictions and conditions, to wit:

He was to take immediate possession of the home and store. He was to occupy the former until its disposal, as set forth in the will.

He was then to take the large Swiss clock, which stood in Mr. Brooks's study, and place it in the show-window of the store, so that it could be plainly seen from the street.

He was then to announce in the town papers that on a certain date he would place on sale ten thousand tops, the invention of the late Elihu Brooks, and would dispose of them as follows:

The price of each top would be one dollar, and each sale would entitle the purchaser to one guess as to what hour and minute the clock would stop. These guesses were to be registered in their order, and in case two or more contestants guessed the correct time the one registering his guess first would be the winner of the contest.

The prize to the winner was Mr. Brooks's thirty-thousand-dollar home!

When Clyde read these conditions he made an indignant and vigorous protest.

"Why, Uncle Elihu must have been crazy when he drew up that will," he declared to Lawyer Patterson. "I won't stand for any such proceeding. It isn't legal. I'll break the will."

"You couldn't do that," the lawyer informed him. "Your uncle was privileged to dispose of his property as he saw fit. I helped him draw up the papers, and I know that it is all perfectly legal. But you go ahead and do as he wishes. You'll be satisfied in the end."

It took the lawyer the best part of two hours to convince the young man that he could not do other than follow out his uncle's wishes, but in the end Clyde yielded to his arguments and agreed to follow Mr. Brooks's instructions to the letter and accept whatever the transaction yielded.

Therefore, the next morning Clyde installed the clock in the store-window, and inserted advertisements in the two local papers announcing that the sale of the tops and the guessing contest would start promptly at seven o'clock the following Monday morning.

The result was astonishing. The town became immediately filled with excitement. Crowds gathered before the store-window to view the clock, while others besieged Clyde and Mr. Patterson to learn if the report was really true and legal.

On being assured that it was, they at once lapsed into a deep and silent reflection in an earnest endeavor to figure out just at what minute the clock would be liable to stop.

The prize was a beautiful old stone mansion, ideally situated on a long, sloping hill, overlooking Crystal Lake, and surrounded by stately old oaks. It had long been the envy of the wealthier residents of the town, many of whom had made efforts to buy it, but without avail, as the late owner had refused to sell at any price.

Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself to them to become the possessor of the property through the process of merely guessing when a clock would stop, at the rate of one dollar a guess, everybody started guessing.

Clyde reached his store at five-thirty Monday morning, to get it in readiness for the rush he anticipated. However, early as it was, he found the president of the Acme Air-Brake Company already there and waiting for him.

"How long have you been here?" asked Clyde, noting the tired expression on the other's face.

"Since midnight," answered the president. "I was determined to get the first crack at this guessing contest."

Clyde opened the store, and the president promptly made a purchase of one thousand four hundred and forty tops, and registered his guesses, one for each minute of the twenty-four hours.

"There," he remarked, as he finished. "I'll bet I've got that place cinched now, and at a mighty cheap price, too. Why, I offered Brooks thirty-five thousand for it, less than a year ago, and he refused."

"Of course, you understand that there is a five-thousand-dollar mortgage on the place," Clyde reminded him.

"I don't care anything about that. I'll have it lifted within twenty-four hours after the clock stops, and will be moved into the house inside of a week."

"It was a rather mean trick to play on you, though," he added kindly to Clyde. "The sale of the tops won't bring you a third of what the home is worth. Of course, it's easy to see what your uncle's scheme was; he was very angry because we refused to advance him money to finance his tops, and he thinks he is getting even by making us buy them. Well, I'm perfectly willing to do so, with the inducements he offers."

At this point, the president of the New Process Brass Company arrived. The first president greeted him derisively.

"You're too late, Jones," he laughed. "I've got this game cinched already."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Jones. "How'd you guess?"

"I began at twelve, noon, and made a guess for every minute of the twenty-four hours."

"Well, that don't necessarily win the contest," grunted Jones, turning to Clyde, and pulling out his check-book. "You can send fourteen hundred and forty tops around to my house, and put

me down for an equal number of guesses, starting at one half minute past twelve, and putting in the half minutes for the full twenty-four hours. The seconds count, I presume?"

"Certainly," answered Clyde.

More top customers began to arrive, and the two presidents returned to their homes.

By noon the trade had grown so brisk that Clyde had to call in help to assist him in passing out the packages. When he closed the store for the night, he found that he had disposed of nearly five thousand tops.

Most of these had gone to the wealthy manufacturers of the town, who had bought them up in lots of five hundred or more.

The next day the trade was not so brisk. The heavy guessing of the wealthier class had frightened off many of the poorer people, who saw that they had little chance of winning. However, Clyde disposed of nearly one thousand tops, and registered an equal number of guesses. By the end of the week he had less than five hundred tops on hand.

Then Lawyer Patterson, who had been an interested but silent watcher of the proceedings, handed Clyde a letter, addressed to him in his uncle's handwriting.

"A week from to-day I will hand you another and last letter of instruction from your uncle," he informed the young man.

Clyde opened the letter, and read the following:

MY DEAR NEPHEW:

I presume you have, by now, disposed of the bulk of my beloved tops; and, if I guessed right when I thought out this scheme for getting rid of them, most of them have been gobbled up by the scalawags who have become rich through my inventions, and turned me down when I most needed their help.

Now, my boy, the first thing I want you to do is to wind up the clock, and, if any of the guessers object, inform them that you have wound it for the last time.

Next, take as much as is necessary from the proceeds from the sale of the tops and pay off the mortgage on the house. Be sure to have that clear, first of all.

Then I want you to send a draft for

two thousand five hundred dollars to the Jonesville Grocery Company, Jonesville, Michigan. Mr. Patterson has written them, and they will understand. As soon after receiving the draft as possible they will ship you by freight a complete stock of groceries, which you are to install in the store—your store—and then open up for business. You ought to be successful, as you have already had considerable experience in this line. And now, my boy, rest quietly until a week from to-day, when I will give you my final instructions; and believe me,

Your affectionate uncle,
ELIHU BROOKS.

When Clyde read that, he felt that he had another grievance.

"Now, see here, Mr. Patterson," he remonstrated, "the money I've received from the sale of those tops ought to belong to me. If I pay off that mortgage it will take over half of it. I can't see any reason why I should pay it. Let the one who wins the contest do that."

"What are you kicking about?" answered Patterson. "You've got a full-fledged grocery stock, and over two thousand dollars in cash left, haven't you? You just trust your uncle and do what he tells you to, and you'll be satisfied—take my word for that."

Clyde was far from satisfied, however. He had wanted that home, and had lost it; and now that he was compelled to pay off the mortgage he felt that his uncle was rubbing it in a little harder than was necessary.

Nevertheless, he followed out the instructions promptly. The mortgage was paid next day, and the draft despatched; and, by the middle of the week, the stock of groceries arrived, and were quickly installed in the store.

When he looked them over and considered the matter, his bitter feelings toward his deceased uncle softened a little.

Perhaps, after all, he was better off than he would have been if his uncle had simply willed him the home and store; for, in that case, he would have had a five-thousand-dollar mortgage to pay, and would not have had a cent to pay it with, and nothing left to start up business.

As he stood now, he was free from debt, had a first-class grocery store, and a substantial bank-account. Yes, after all, perhaps it was for the best.

As the week's end drew near, large crowds gathered in front of the store, to watch the clock and speculate on when it would stop. Clyde had disposed of the last of his tops two days before; the guesses were all in, and it was now merely a matter of waiting until the timepiece ran down.

Saturday came, and with it Mr. Patterson, with the final letter of instructions from Clyde's uncle. When that young man acquainted himself with the contents, he nearly fainted from astonishment. The letter read:

MY DEAR NEPHEW:

If I guess right, you have by now disposed of the last of the tops and my revenge is complete!

You are, by this time, fully settled in your new grocery-store, and have plenty of cash with which to carry on the business. I hope that you will be successful, and that in time you will marry some nice girl and go to live in the old home—for, of course, you are to occupy that until the clock stops.

The case for that clock was imported from Switzerland, but the works are my own invention, which I have never patented or offered for sale. When you wound up the clock a week ago to-day, you did so for the first time it has been wound in twelve years—and it is now wound up to run for one century.

Wishing you much success and happiness, I am,

Your affectionate uncle,
ELIHU BROOKS.

INDIFFERENCE.

LET the world slide, let the world go;
A fig for care, a fig for wo!
If I can't pay, why I can owe,
And death makes equal the high and low.

Thomas Heywood.

WANTED BY - UNCLE SAM.*

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Jailbird," "When a Man's Hungry," "The Isle of Mysteries," etc.

Certain thrilling experiences that befell two army men and a sailor after they had left the service and looked forward to a peaceful civilian existence.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

FRANK LEFFINGWELL and Al Randolph, arriving in New York from the Philippines, fall in with a sailor, Simon Semple, also just discharged. The three men pool their money, which, together with their discharge papers, is stolen that evening from Leffingwell's pocket. They are accosted by a young woman who asks their protection from a man who is following her. The man, attempting to pass them, is knocked down by Randolph and taken to the hospital with a fractured skull.

Randolph is arrested, and his two friends leave him in jail to try to procure legal help. Seeing in a paper an advertisement offering five thousand dollars for the capture of a man named Mitchell, a deserter from Leffingwell's regiment, they determine to earn the reward. Semple traces to the Gondola Apartment House, on Riverside Drive, the young woman of their adventure, whose testimony they want in Randolph's behalf. Meanwhile, Leffingwell interviews the writer of the advertisement, a Mr. Addison, who also lives at the Gondola Apartments. He learns that Addison's ward is in love with the deserter, who, Addison believes, is planning to marry her for the fortune which is to be hers on her birthday next month. Addison promises to put his own lawyer on Randolph's case if Leffingwell will aid him in capturing Mitchell.

That night, as he leaves the Gondola, Leffingwell chances to notice a light flashed in signal from the Jersey shore and answered from the windows of the apartment-house. He and Semple row across the river, where they trace the light to a little shack. As they approach the hut a bulldog rushes upon them and fastens its teeth in Semple's leg. At the same time two armed men, one of whom is Mitchell, run from the hut and force them to put up their hands.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

MITCHELL'S companion gave a sharp command to the bulldog; and the latter, with evident reluctance, relinquished his hold on Simple Simon's leg, and walked over to his master, grumbling and growling, as though in protest against this order.

Leffingwell, greatly to his surprise, then noticed, for the first time, that the man was a Chinaman—a one-eyed Chinaman, who wore clothes of American style, and had discarded his pigtail.

His amazement at this discovery was cut short by the voice of Mitchell.

"So, it's you, my dear friend Leffingwell, is it?" sneered the deserter. "Why, this is indeed a great and glad-some surprise. I can't tell you how delighted I am to see you. It's so pleasant

to have one's friends drop in unexpectedly, you know."

"By the way, let me introduce my good friend, Mr. Beem Nomm Low Wing. I believe you and your red-headed friend have already met. Now, that we're all properly acquainted, we can converse without restraint. I trust that you and your friend are prepared to take off your hats and stay a while, my dear Leffingwell?"

The latter scowled.

"I wish you'd cut out this cheap sarcasm and get down to business," he growled. "I don't know what you intend to do with us; but, whatever it is, hurry up and do it. That's all I ask of you."

"Now don't be impatient, my dear Leffingwell," said the deserter, in a mock tone of reproach. "To be quite candid with you, I'm a little puzzled to know

* Began March ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

just *what* to do with you. I don't exactly relish the idea of killing you, and yet I really don't see what other course is open to me."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Leffingwell contemptuously. "We're not afraid that you're going to kill us. You're too much of a coward, Mitchell, to run the risk of going to the electric-chair."

"Oh, really, I don't think there'd be very much risk of that," the deserter retorted smoothly. "I could put a bullet into your head, and into the red head of your friend here, and there'd be nobody to bear witness against me. My friend, Beem Nomm Low here, is too loyal to betray me; and, of course, the bulldog can't talk. I guess I can put an end to the pair of you very nicely, without running any danger of going to the chair for it."

"But you won't do it," declared Leffingwell confidently. "I know your caliber too well, Mitchell, to be afraid of you. You haven't got enough nerve to do anything like that."

"It isn't exactly prudent of you to talk in that manner," the deserter retorted. "If you set any value on your life, and the life of your friend, you should not question my courage, you know. It isn't good policy. Your words almost tempt me to pull this trigger—just to prove to you that I *have* got the nerve."

"And I tell you again that you daren't do it," cried Leffingwell, with a defiant recklessness which caused Simple Simon to glance at him in surprise and trepidation.

"Whether you've got the nerve or not," the latter hastened to interpose, addressing Mitchell, "I'm sure you wouldn't murder us in cold blood. You don't want to forget that we had you in our power earlier to-day, and were merciful enough to let you go. One good turn deserves another, you know."

Simple Simon was no coward; but life was dear to him, and he did not see the sense of throwing it away out of mere bravado. Not knowing Mitchell's character as well as Leffingwell knew it, he did not share the latter's positiveness that the deserter was too much lacking in courage to make good his threat.

"I assure you that I have not for-

gotten that favor, my red-headed friend," Mitchell replied. "But, on the other hand, I haven't forgotten the emphatic kick with which our dear friend Leffingwell sent me speeding on my way. The recollection of that kick sort of takes away my gratitude. Besides, I have since learned that my dear Leffingwell has paid a visit to my sweetheart, and tried to blacken my character in her eyes.

"True, he did not succeed; but, nevertheless, I bear him a grudge for it. As Shakespeare remarks: 'He who steals my purse steals trash; but he who robs me of my good name,' etc., etc.

"However, that is not the point. It is not for the sake of revenge that I feel constrained to kill you both, but merely as a matter of self-protection."

"I very much fear that your object in coming here now was not to pay me a social call, but to seize me and hand me over to the authorities, in order to earn that big reward. Now, of course, I can't afford to let you do that. My liberty is very dear to me, and I don't relish the idea of languishing in a military prison.

"Therefore, the question presents itself, what am I going to do with you if I don't kill you?"

He pretended to deliberate for a full minute, during which time Simple Simon's face wore a very anxious and apprehensive expression, while Leffingwell's under lip curled in a contemptuous smile.

"I have an idea," cried the deserter suddenly. "I think I perceive a way out of the difficulty. I will have to ask you gentlemen to be kind enough to step inside our humble little dwelling. But, first of all, I must request my friend, Beem Nomm Low, to search you both—while you continue to keep your hands above your heads, of course—in order to make sure that you have no weapons."

The one-eyed Chinaman obediently made a careful examination of their pockets, and reported that they carried no arms.

"Very good," Mitchell commented. "That being the case, I will not trouble you to keep your hands up any longer. It must be an uncomfortable position.

Be good enough to step this way, gentlemen."

Once again Leffingwell had to struggle with a wild impulse to hurl himself upon the deserter and endeavor to wrest his weapon from him.

But he checked himself, with the recollection that Mitchell, although not possessing nerve enough to shoot him down in cold blood, doubtless would not hesitate to commit murder, if it came to a struggle. He realized that a coward is oftentimes the most dangerous of men, when rendered desperate.

And, besides, the one-eyed Celestial looked like a man who was prepared to kill at the slightest provocation. His features were sinister and absolutely merciless. Also, there was the savage bulldog to be reckoned with.

Realizing that the odds were so greatly against himself and Simple Simon, Leffingwell sullenly followed his companion into the hut, the bulldog snapping savagely at their heels, and the revolvers of Mitchell and the Chinaman leveled at their heads.

As they entered the place, they saw that it was a single-roomed structure, the interior quite as wretched as the outside.

The wooden walls were bare and dirty; the rough plank floor was devoid of carpet or oilcloth, and the only furniture the room contained was a rusty oil-stove, a dirty looking cot-bed, a small, unpolished oblong table, and an old cane chair, with the seat broken and a rung missing.

"Welcome, my friends," said Mitchell, grinning as he noticed the look of surprise with which Leffingwell regarded these surroundings. "I hope you will be comfortable here, and manage to make yourselves thoroughly at home, for I am afraid I must ask you to tarry here for an indefinite period.

"Kindly go to that closet, my dear Beem Nomm Low, and bring out the coil of stout rope you will find there. I guess we shall be compelled to bind these gentlemen hand and foot, in order to make sure that they do not wander away; although, really, they would be very foolish to try anything of that sort. The dog's teeth are very sharp—as our red-headed friend knows—and he'll be

on the alert all the time, ready to tear them to pieces, if they try to leave."

The Chinaman opened the door of a plain wooden closet, and produced therefrom a coil of strong rope.

With this he securely bound the hands and feet of Leffingwell and Simon, so that the unfortunate men were unable to move a limb; and then he tied them in an upright position to two perpendicular beams which supported the roof of the structure.

"Very good," commented Mitchell. "Now, I guess they're just about as helpless as two strong men could be."

He stood regarding his impotent victims with a look of infinite satisfaction on his dissipated face.

"And now, old man," he continued, addressing the Chinaman, "I guess you and I can leave our two friends here, while we take a trip to a safer part of the country.

"Don't hesitate to make yourselves at home, gentlemen, while we are gone. If there should be anything that you require, in the way of food or drink, just ring for the butler, and he will cheerfully attend to your wants.

"By the way, you can exercise your voices by shouting, if you wish. There's nobody for miles around to be disturbed by it, so you can yell all you want. Come on, Beem Nomm Low, we won't tarry here any longer. Good-by, Leffingwell, old boy. The next time we meet, I hope to be married to a charming young woman worth two million dollars."

With a laugh, he walked out of the hut, followed by the one-eyed Chinaman.

As the door closed behind them, Simple Simon looked at Leffingwell despairingly.

"Looks to me as if we're in a pretty bad fix," he groaned. "This rope is as strong as double irons, and I guess that rascal was telling the truth when he said that there ain't anybody around to hear our shouts.

"Looks to me pretty much as if we're going to be here for days, and perhaps weeks or months before anybody discovers us; an', in the meantime, we shall perish from hunger and thirst.

"By the way, messmate, I wonder if that cuss was serious when he told us that if we wanted food or drink we

should ring for the butler! I'll be jigged if I can see any bell."

CHAPTER XIV.

HELPLESS IN A HUT.

IN a frenzy of fury and despair, Leffingwell tugged savagely at the ropes which fettered his hands and feet, binding him to the perpendicular beam.

"Tain't no use doing that, comrade," Simple Simon remarked sadly. "If you was three times as strong as you are you couldn't bu'st them ropes. They're too darned strong. You'll only exhaust yourself by trying it. We're in a bad fix; but it ain't any use getting excited over it. Let's take it calm and easy, and hope that somebody will come and rescue us before we die of starvation."

"If only I knew where that dirty cad Mitchell intends to go," groaned Leffingwell. "That's what's worrying me. I don't care about myself, or what happens to me; but it makes my blood boil to think that, after our rare good luck in catching him for the second time to-day, he's managed to slip through our hands again. What blanked fools we were to come here unarmed. If we had carried guns, I feel confident that we could have got the best of them."

"We'd have stood an even chance, at least," Simple Simon agreed. "It would have been a case of who could have fired first, I guess. At any rate, if I'd had a gun, I'd have put a bullet through the ugly head of that darned bulldog. The brute didn't do a thing to my leg. It feels mighty sore where he bit me."

"We bungled the whole thing disgracefully," growled Leffingwell. "We rushed into this ambush like a couple of blind mules. We might have suspected that Mitchell would be armed and on his guard."

"Well, we'll know better next time," remarked Simple Simon, making an heroic effort to appear cheerful. "It's no use worrying over what's already happened. What's done can't be undone."

"Next time?" queried Leffingwell fiercely. "There won't be any next time. Do you think we stand the ghost of a show of catching sight of that cad again? Now that he knows that we're

on to the secret of this shanty, he won't be fool enough to come here any more. The chances are that he's now on his way out of town, and won't come back to this city again until all danger is over."

"It's too bad," sighed Simon. "By the way, messmate, I wonder who owns this here shack—Mitchell, or the one-eyed Chinaman? They make a mighty queer pair, I'm thinking. Wonder how the divvle they ever got together."

"I don't know, and I don't care," growled Leffingwell. "Such things don't interest me just now. What I want to know is how we can get free of these confounded ropes, and make after that cad before he has a chance to get far away. It seems to me that, with all your experience on the seas, you ought to know enough about ropes to be able to suggest something."

"My experience on the seas teaches me that, when a feller is lashed to a mast with ropes of the thickness of these here, he stands about as much chance of freeing himself as a rat in a trap," retorted Simon sadly. "These knots was tied to stay, my lad. I give that there Chink credit for knowing how to tie a knot that is a knot. I shouldn't be surprised to learn that he's been a seaman, at some time or other."

"The only thing for us to do is to shout for help, I guess. Tain't likely that it will do us any good; but we might as well try, anyway."

They shouted in unison; but the only response they obtained was the furious barking of the bulldog outside.

They could hear the savage beast, maddened by their shouts, hurling his body against the closed door of the hut, in a vain attempt to get in.

"We can thank our lucky stars that that door is closed," remarked Simon, with a shudder. "Bound and helpless as we are, we'd make a nice meal for that vicious brute if he could get to us. I'm mighty thankful to them fellers for not leaving the door ajar."

"Never mind the dog," Leffingwell commanded. "Keep on shouting. If only somebody would come along and hear us!"

"Tain't very likely to happen, I'm afraid," replied Simon. "That deserter

chap said there wasn't a soul for miles around, and I guess he told us the truth. I hope that beast ain't able to climb through that there window," he added apprehensively. "If he does, we're a couple of goners."

"He can't climb through it," Leffingwell assured him. "It's too high from the ground. Keep up the shouting, Simon. It's our only hope."

"I don't like to shout," replied the other timorously. "It makes that beast so mad. Listen to him howl. It gives me the willies to hear him."

"Pooh," exclaimed Leffingwell. "There's no need to fear the dog. His howl can't do us any harm. He can't get inside."

"Don't be too positive of that," said Simon. "I ain't as sure as I'd like to be that he can't leap through that window. I'd rather face ten men, with forty-eight-caliber guns in their hands, than that dog. I've felt his teeth once, and I'd rather stay here until I die than have him take another bite out of me."

But, despite his words, he joined Leffingwell in calling for help; and the desperate pair continued to yell for half an hour, at the end of which time they were so hoarse that they were compelled to desist.

"Reckon it ain't going to do any good," sighed Simon. "If we were wrecked on a desert island, I guess we'd stand about as much chance of attracting anybody's attention as we do here. I guess we're up against it good and hard, old comrade, and must make the best of it."

Gradually the howls of the bulldog outside died down, until, at length, they gave way to low growls, succeeded finally by complete silence.

Apparently, the brute had also given up hope—hope of gaining access to the interior of the hut, and hurling himself upon his enemies.

But, after a lapse of about ten minutes, the dog began to bark frantically again, as though something was arousing him to a fresh display of fury.

"Wonder what's the matter with him now," whispered Simon. "Can it be possible that he hears anybody outside?"

"Perhaps he does," rejoined Leffingwell hopefully. "Let's shout again; and,

for Heaven's sake, yell as loud as you can."

They called "Help! Help!" at the top of their voices; and this time, to their great joy, they heard an answering shout outside the hut.

"This way men," cried a deep bass voice. "They're in this shack. Look out for that dog! He seems to be vicious."

As though in acknowledgment of this compliment, the bulldog's snarls suddenly became so ferocious that Simple Simon's blood came pretty near curdling.

"Get out of the way there, you ugly beast," cried another voice. "Ha! Would you? Not much. If you're looking for trouble you shall have it."

There was a particularly ferocious snarl, a sharp report, a dismal howl, and then an eloquent silence.

"That settles him," said the man's voice. "Sorry I had to kill him, but I couldn't help myself. You fellows saw how he sprang at me. Owners of such vicious dogs should keep them chained up, or expect to have them shot."

"Hooray!" cried Simon exultantly to Leffingwell. "They've shot that darned dog. Whoever that feller is, I'm his friend for life for doing it."

"Who are you in there, and what's the matter with you?" shouted one of the men outside. "Open the door and let us in."

"We can't," cried Leffingwell. "Our hands and feet are bound, and we can't move. Break in the door and release us, for Heaven's sake."

"Better be careful there, fellows," somebody outside cautioned. "This may be a stall of some kind. Look out for treachery."

"Pooh! If they try anything of that sort, we'll fill every darn one of 'em full of lead," replied the deep bass voice fiercely. "Shove in the door, men, and let's see what's going on."

A second later the door came in with a crash, and four uniformed men rushed into the hut, each of them carrying a revolver in his hand.

"We're police officers," announced the man with the deep bass voice. "What's the matter here?"

"Can't you see what's the matter," cried Leffingwell fretfully. "We're tied

up here like a couple of trussed turkeys. For Heaven's sake, man, get a knife and cut us loose without any more delay."

"Ha! Who's responsible for this?" demanded the deep-voiced man, who seemed to be in command of the squad.

"A man named Mitchell and a one-eyed Chinaman," replied Leffingwell. "Hurry up and release us from these confounded ropes, and we'll explain everything to you."

The policemen produced jack-knives and began to saw on the ropes. In a few minutes Leffingwell and Simple Simon were free, and began to thank their deliverers profusely.

But the deep-voiced policeman cut short their expressions of gratitude.

"Never mind thanking us," he said gruffly. "We'll dispense with all that. Tell us instead who you are, and how and why this happened. You fellows don't live in this place, do you?"

"No. We came over here in a rowboat to catch Mitchell, who is a deserter from the United States army, and was living here with the Chinaman."

"And Mitchell and the Chinaman caught you instead, eh?" said the policeman, with a grin.

Leffingwell nodded grimly.

"Yes. I wish to goodness you fellows had arrived here sooner. If you'd come an hour ago we might have caught the cad after all."

"Well, you're mighty lucky that we're here at all," retorted the policeman. "In all probability you'd have been tied up here for several days to come, if it hadn't been for the watchman of that boat-club across the river."

"Is that watchman responsible for our being rescued?" cried Leffingwell in surprise.

"Yes. You see, we belong to the river-squad, and as our launch passed the boat-house a while ago he hailed us and told us of two suspicious men, who had borrowed one of his boats. I guess you were the fellows, eh?"

Leffingwell nodded.

"Well, our suspicions were aroused, and we decided to investigate. When we came across your moored rowboat we suspected something was wrong, and landed to look for you and find out what you were after."

"I'm mighty glad you did so," declared Leffingwell. "I suppose there's no chance of overtaking that deserter now, eh?" he added wistfully.

"I'm afraid not. Not unless you know in what direction he went. He may have crossed the river in a rowboat or launch, or he may have gone inland. In either event he's had a pretty good start of us, and I reckon he's miles away by this time."

"Confound him!" growled Leffingwell. "I'd give my right hand to see that cad behind bars."

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTANT CLUE.

BEFORE leaving the hut the river-policemen made a thorough search of the premises, but the only objects of interest they discovered were the carriage-lamp which Mitchell had used for signaling, and a complete opium layout which they found in the closet.

The latter, they guessed, was the property of the Chinaman; but there were two pipes in the set, and Leffingwell half suspected that Mitchell had been using one of them.

He mentioned his suspicion to the leader of the police-squad, whose name, by the way, was Sergeant Nolan.

The latter took the queer-looking, long bamboo tubes in his hand and examined them carefully.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you're right," he commented. "This pipe here has been used by a fellow new at the game. I can tell that by the amateurish way he's handled his dope. I was detailed down in Chinatown for four years before I was sent to the river-squad, and there ain't much about dope smoking I don't know."

"Of one thing I'm certain, though," he added; "and that is, that that deserter chap has *not* been hitting the pipe to-day. If he had been smoking the stuff within the past twenty-four hours he wouldn't have possessed sufficient energy to be able to turn the tables on you when you broke in on him."

"Opium smoking makes a fellow drowsy and listless for hours afterward, especially a beginner. If that fellow had

been up against the dope to-day, you'd have been able to take him, gun and all, without a struggle on his part."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Leffingwell disgustedly. "What wretched luck I have!"

"Oh, well, you'll probably get another chance at him," remarked the sergeant comfortably. "If your friend, the deserter, has hit the pipe once he'll probably do it again. Once a man begins to smoke that stuff he can't keep away from it, and the chances are that before very long this fellow will go to some dope-joint to roll pills and smoke himself into insensibility."

"I wonder what that girl will say when she learns that her lover has become a dope-fiend," mused Leffingwell. "I must inform Mr. Addison of the fact. It's another strong point against Mitchell, of course. I suppose, however, that foolish young woman won't believe it. She's so infatuated with that scoundrel that even if she saw him with the pipe to his lips I guess she'd refuse to believe the evidence of her own eyes."

"If I were you," went on the sergeant, "I'd spend a few nights in Chinatown. I think you stand a good chance of running across either your deserter or the one-eyed Chinaman or both of them down there, sooner or later."

"Then you don't think he's gone far away from New York, eh?" inquired Leffingwell eagerly.

"Well, that depends upon how much of a scare your unexpected visit gave him. Of course, there are Chinese quarters in other cities, and he and his Chink friend may have fled to one of these. I think, however, that there's about an even chance that they won't bother to leave New York, but inside of a few hours will steer for the nearest place where they can get opium, which, of course, is Chinatown."

"Do ye think there's a chance of their coming back here?" broke in Simple Simon.

The sergeant shook his head.

"I hardly think they'll dare to return," he replied. "Although, of course, there's a slight possibility of it. There's no telling what crazy chances men will take when the dope habit has unbalanced their brains. It's likely, though, that

they wouldn't have gone away and left you here bound and helpless, unless they'd fully made up their minds to desert this place for good."

"But ain't it strange that they should have left that there confounded bulldog and this here opium layout behind them, unless they intended to come back?" argued Simple Simon.

"Well, that does seem somewhat odd; but, of course, they may have decided to get rid of the dog," replied the sergeant. "As for this layout, they may have forgotten about it in the excitement of the moment, or they may have reckoned that it wasn't worth the bother of carrying away."

"This is a pretty cheap outfit, and they can easily get another one like it for a few dollars. It wouldn't be worth their while to run the risk of being nabbed by coming back for it."

"Then you wouldn't advise us to wait here for the rest of the night on the chance of their returning," inquired Leffingwell.

"No. I think you'd have your wait for nothing. Even if they come back at all, they ain't likely to do so to-night. If they haven't beaten it to some other city, they're far more likely to go down to Chinatown to-night than to return to this shack. No doubt that one-eyed Chinaman is well acquainted in the Chink section, and he'll take that deserter to some joint down there where they can pass the night in safety."

"Very good," said Leffingwell grimly. "Then we'll go to Chinatown right away. If that cad is there I'm going to get him to-night if I have to visit every den in the section."

"I suppose you know the district pretty well, eh?" the sergeant inquired.

"No. I'm sorry to say I don't. I've only been there three or four times in my life," replied Leffingwell.

"And I haven't been there even that much," added Simple Simon.

The sergeant gave a roar of laughter.

"Do you hear that, men?" he asked, turning to his subordinates. "Here's a young man who's only seen Chinatown three or four times in his life, and yet he talks about going down there and getting his man, just as if it was as easy as picking plums out of a pie."

The other policemen echoed his laugh. "He stands a swell chance," drawled one.

"I should say so," declared the sergeant. "You'd better get somebody to show you around, my boy," turning to Leffingwell. "Otherwise, you stand a mighty poor chance of finding your man. Those Chinks can hide a chap so completely that even a bloodhound would have difficulty in tracking him down.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he added impulsively. "I don't know why you're so particularly keen on catching this deserter chap" (he had not seen the advertisement in the newspaper, offering the five thousand dollars reward); "but I kind of like the looks of the pair of you, and I feel disposed to help you.

"The day after to-morrow I'll have a night off, and, if you like, I'll make an appointment to meet you, and take you through Chineeville."

"I'd be glad to accept your kind offer," replied Leffingwell; "but really I can't afford to wait until the day after to-morrow. That fellow may be down there to-night, and, if so, I must get him before he has a chance to get away."

"Well, I guess you'll find you won't be able to accomplish anything alone; but, of course, you're welcome to try it, and I wish you luck. We're going back to the launch now. Want us to give you a lift to the other side of the river?"

"Thanks. We'd like to avail ourselves of your invitation; but we promised to return that rowboat to the watchman of the boat-club and—"

"Oh, that's all right," the sergeant interrupted him; "we'll attend to that. We'll take the boat in tow of our launch and see that it's returned all right. Come along, men. It's high time we were moving."

Leffingwell and Simple Simon stepped into the police launch, and were taken across to the New York shore. Nor was this the only courtesy which the river-policemen accorded them.

Upon learning that Simple Simon had been bitten by the Chinaman's bulldog, one of the men, who possessed some surgical skill, washed and dressed the wound, aboard the launch, applying a

bandage as skilfully as any surgeon could have done; but, at the same time, he advised Simple Simon to go to a hospital as soon as possible, and have the wound examined, in order to make sure that there was no danger of hydrophobia.

"Well, after all, our luck isn't so bad, is it, old man?" observed Leffingwell cheerfully, as they stood on the bank watching the police launch disappear up the river.

"Bad! I should say not," cried Simon. "Seems to me we've got more good luck than sense. Who'd have thought we'd have got out of our troubles so easy? An hour ago I thought for sure we were doomed to die of starvation in that confounded hut. We're mighty fortunate to have escaped so easy."

"Pooh! I wasn't alluding to that," replied Leffingwell. "What I meant was that we're lucky that that opium layout was found in the hut. If it hadn't been for that discovery, we'd have had no reason to suspect that Mitchell and that one-eyed Chinaman were dope-smokers, and that in all possibility they've fled to Chinatown to spend the night in some dope den.

"It looks as if Dame Fortune, with unusual generosity, is going to give us another chance to catch that cad; for, somehow, I feel positive we'll find him in Chinatown to-night, and, if we do, he's not going to get away this time, I promise you."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN CHINATOWN.

"MESSMATE," said Simple Simon to Leffingwell, as the pair climbed the steep embankment of Riverside Drive, "do you think we're doing the wise thing in going down to Chinatown to-night? Don't you think we'd do better to wait until to-morrow?"

"Wait! I should say not," replied Leffingwell emphatically. "To-morrow night may be too late. There's nothing like striking while the iron is hot."

"But think of the danger!" protested Simon earnestly. "That deserter chap and his one-eyed Chinese friend are armed, and we ain't. If we should run

across them down there, they probably wouldn't hesitate to put daylight through us this time."

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid of that," exclaimed Leffingwell. "It'll take more than a gun to scare me next time I get within hailing distance of that cad. I didn't think you were such a coward, Simple."

"I don't think I'm a coward. I guess I've got as much courage as the average man; but I can't see the sense of throwing our lives away; and, in my opinion, any unarmed man who deliberately goes up against an enemy who has a loaded gun is doing just that."

"Pooh! You weren't always so prudent, Simon. I haven't forgotten the circumstances under which we first met you. You broke up that meeting of rabid anarchists, and were willing to fight the whole savage crowd by yourself. And to think that it is such a man who now has the nerve to preach prudence and caution to me!"

"That was different," replied Simon earnestly. "I only had myself to think of then; and in my rage I didn't care what happened to me, but now we've got to think of our messmate in prison. Remember, he relies on us to help him out of his trouble."

"By a rare stroke of luck, I've managed to find out where that there young woman lives. To-morrow we must get an interview with her, and do our best to persuade her to go to court and testify in his favor. That's more important than capturing that deserter, to my mind. If we come across those fellers, and get shot dead by them, what's going to become of our messmate? Who's going to look out for him?"

"Well, we must take care to see that we don't get shot dead," replied Leffingwell calmly. "If we find Mitchell and his one-eyed companion in a dope-joint, the chances are, as that police sergeant said, they'll be so much under the influence of the drug, when we break in on them, that they won't be able to move a hand, and we'll have no difficulty in taking their weapons away from them."

"Besides, I've got some good news for you about Al. I have not told you yet that R. A., who is a very rich man,

has promised to come to his rescue, and is going to put his case in the hands of a good lawyer, and pay all expenses."

"You see, therefore, that even if anything does happen to us, Al will be looked out for. If you wish, however, you can stay here and try to get an interview with that girl in the morning, and I'll go down there alone."

"I guess not," replied Simple Simon indignantly. "If you go, I'm going too, of course. After all, there's some consolation in knowing that even though those fellers have got guns, they ain't got that there confounded bulldog with them this time. Besides, we may not succeed in finding them," he added hopefully.

"Oh, we'll find them, all right," declared Leffingwell confidently. "I feel it in my bones that we're going to get that cad this time. Well, if you insist on coming along, old man, let's be starting. We haven't any time to lose."

Half an hour later, they found themselves in that queer section of New York which the resident Chinese have transformed into a town of their own.

They walked through the narrow, crooked streets, staring at the odd-looking buildings, and boldly entering every dive, chop-suey joint, and "gin-mill" to which they were able to obtain admission; but not a clue could they discover as to the whereabouts of the man for whom they were searching.

At one time their hopes mounted high, for their nostrils suddenly caught the pungent odor of opium in process of burning, and eagerly they rushed up a rickety, uncarpeted stairway, confident that at length they had found the deserter.

"Careful!" whispered Simple Simon to Leffingwell, as the latter placed his hand upon the latch of a door from beyond which the opium fumes were issuing. "Remember that they're armed, and they may not be thoroughly under the influence of the dope yet. Hadn't we better wait until they've smoked a little more. We—"

But, paying no heed to this prudent warning, the eager Leffingwell turned the handle of the door and rushed into the room.

(To be continued.)

A TALE OF THE BOTTLE.

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

The sudden recollection that sent a bookkeeper back
across the ferry toward home in double-quick time.

SMITH'S hand trembled a little as he took up his pen to go to work on the long columns of figures. There were deep rings under his eyes. His cheeks had grown flabby these last weeks, as though the flesh had drawn away from a skin that used to fit.

A grayish pallor had taken the place of the fine color which office confinement had never been able to destroy.

"Aha!" you say. "Same old thing; one of those long, hard sprges that send a man to the alcoholic ward."

"Aha," I reply, "you'd better put your money on a horse that is named on the card. You need several more guesses. Mr. Smith never got off the front seat of the water-wagon in his life. Why, he fought like a mad bull when they made him take whisky to bring him out of a chill, two years before this story begins."

No, the truth of the matter is that Smith had a baby just six weeks old. If you had possessed a bare speaking acquaintance with Smith, you would have known that. Every one at the office knew.

Every one knew just how much it weighed the day it was born; just how much more the next day; just how much less the third day; just how much—and so on for six times seven days.

Every one knew that Smith was afraid to trust the nurse, or even his wife, to prepare the milk for that precious child's bottles. Every one knew how much he had to pay for certified milk, how many ounces from the top of the bottle he took, how much water and milk-sugar and lime-water and barley and all the rest of it went into each day's supply of infant food.

Every one knew just how many hours Smith had walked the floor with his first-born the previous night.

But what you would not have known

on that particular morning—what nobody knew—was that Smith had poisoned his baby's food. Smith did not know it himself when he came in.

On the train his mind had been occupied, as usual of late, with thoughts of the preparation of "modified milk" formulae, and there had come a vague feeling that, in putting up the day's food this morning, he had done something unusual. Wherefore, while his eye sought an elusive twenty-cent error in yesterday's accounts, his thought searched his memory to discover just what he had mixed into his baby's milk.

His finger reached the middle of the dime column for the sixteenth time just as his mind recalled exactly what he had done amiss. The pallor deepened on his face. His finger shook away over into the thousand-dollar row. Then it helped the rest of his hand fish his watch from his pocket.

Eight forty-five—Heavens! The baby's first feeding from this morning's preparation would be due at nine. Yes—and he had put an extra powder into that mixture—about one or two teaspoonfuls.

And the only extra powder around the baby's things was boracic acid. He was sure of it. He had kept all those things separate. He knew just what was there.

He rushed to the telephone and called up a number in Harlem.

"Louise—Louise," he cried as soon as he heard the snap caused by the removal of the receiver at the other end.

"My name is not Louise," came back frigidly, and there was another snap as the receiver went back on its hook.

Then he remembered that he had moved to Hackensack a month before the baby was born.

There was no telephone in the Hackensack house, but the drug-store on the nearest corner would take a message.

"Give me 15 A Hackensack," he shouted into the mouthpiece.

While he waited for a reply, he watched the big hand of his timepiece reach for and cover the figure "XI."

"I find 15 A's busy," came back at last. "I'll call you."

At ten-second intervals, Smith repeated his call—ineffectually. It was one minute to nine when Central said sweetly: "There's your party; go ahead."

There was a great roar in Smith's ear. Some one was yelling "Hallo!" at the top of his voice. Smith yelled back. The halloing continued until the precious minute was up. The party at the other end then moderated his voice enough to make Smith understand.

"You'll have to wait till Mr. Pilham comes back. I'm his father—but I'm deaf. There's just been another party trying—"

Smith dropped the receiver on to the hook. It was too late.

His boy—the heir to his life-insurance—the future bishop, governor, President, financial magnate—was—a *goner*.

No. There was still a little hope. Boracic acid was not labeled "Poison." Probably it was not so terribly virulent. Perhaps, if he could get word home in half or three-quarters of an hour, a doctor could be got who would be able to do something.

A telegram! No; he could reach home before a telegram could arrive.

All he said to the boss was, "I must go—my baby's dying." He waited not to hear words of sympathy.

He ran to the ferry-house, and just caught the 9.15 boat. As he took his seat he got out his time-table and found that the next train left at 10.15.

The majority of the morning trains run into, and not out of, the city. He must send the telegram, and take a chance on its reaching home in time.

He was the first man off the boat at the Jersey City slip. He gave one of the deck-hands a half dollar to let him through the gate, and made a flying leap when the boat was full two yards from the float.

By the time the other passengers were starting up the walk, he was trying to control the shake in his fingers and form the words of the message home.

"Baby is poisoned," he wrote. "Get the doctor immediately."

"How quick can you rush that through?" he asked of the operator.

"In two minutes," was the reply.

Smith pulled out his watch, when it occurred to him that he would probably scare his wife to death with such a message.

"Have you got that off yet?" he cried to the man whose finger was working rapidly on the telegraph-key. There was a moment's pause before the telegrapher replied: "Just finished it, sir. I was lucky to get a clear wire in a hurry."

"Gracious!" shouted the husband and father. "You've probably killed my wife with fright. Why couldn't you wait a minute?"

"Why," exclaimed the operator in astonished wrath, "you blanked idiot, you told me to send it in a hurry. What do you mean?"

But Smith did not hear him. He was busy writing another message.

"I put boracic acid in food. Doctor can save him," he scrawled.

He handed the operator a dollar bill with the yellow slip, whereupon that indignant gentleman swallowed his anger and rushed through the second message. Smith wondered whether this one would follow the first immediately, or have to wait for a messenger-boy to stroll back from his house to get it.

Up and down the vast waiting-room he paced wildly. Once he counted his ready cash, with a view to hiring a special train. He concluded that ten dollars would hardly induce the company to accommodate him thus.

So he watched the sign-boards over the gates. Each one he committed to memory, then reread forty times before it was removed.

His mind was in an agony. One minute he would imagine he saw his babe in the throes of convulsions. Next minute he decided that the acid would probably send the child out of this world in silent, deadly sleep.

As he walked to and fro he overheard two guards holding a whispered consultation as to whether he was an escaped inmate from some asylum, whom they ought to turn over to the station police.

Just about that time another guard leisurely shoved signs into a big bulletin-frame and over one of the gates, indicating that the N. Y., S. and W. train, for a dozen other stations and *Hackensack*, was in condition to receive prospective passengers.

Once more he was the first man through the gate. But he had to wait for the train to start, exactly like every one else. In his case, that meant a wait of fifteen minutes.

There was a delay of two minutes more in getting out of the station-yards. There were five stops before *Hackensack*, and Smith thought he had never seen so many people getting on and off, so much baggage to be handled at each stop.

But there was no wreck. Neither of the bridges was washed away, or opened to let a stray catboat pass. There were two tracks, and the train did not have to switch for others. It eventually reached *Hackensack* at four minutes past eleven.

Smith sprinted up Main Street at a pace that almost aroused that busy thoroughfare from its repose. As he turned the corner into Pleasantdale Avenue, he caught sight of the ambling figure of a messenger-boy ahead.

From the opposite corner a small automobile sped toward him, regardless of the regulations of the town council. The automobile, the boy, and Smith arrived at the front steps of his home simultaneously. Also simultaneously, Mrs. Smith opened the door and looked wildly at the three.

Everybody spoke at once:

"Oh, what have you done! Oh, doctor, save my child!" wailed Mrs. Smith.

"What you been doing to your baby?" asked the doctor in his easy-going, unalarmed, professionally offhand manner.

"Message for Mrs. Smith," announced the boy, as though he were by far the most important individual around.

"Thank God, he's still alive!" shouted Mr. Smith.

For, above the questions and announcements, powerful enough to have drowned out all these sounds, the inarticulate shrieks of Baby Smith could be heard. If Mr. Smith had not been puffing so loudly, he would probably

have heard his son and heir by the time he was half-way home from the station.

All went inside, still talking—all but the messenger-boy. He was left behind.

Finding himself thus neglected, he took possession of one of the chairs on the veranda, and, to keep from growing impatient with the delay, took out the yellow volume from his pocket and began to read where the hero, with a mighty leap, bearing the heroine in his arms, cleared the bottomless chasm and hid himself and his sweetheart in the long swamp-grass on the other side, just in time to escape the villainous pursuers.

Mrs. Smith began to talk again—or, rather, continued to talk:

"Oh, dear, what shall we do? What shall we do? Everything is all ready, doctor. There is a boiler full of hot water for a bath. The mustard is there—I put a mustard-plaster on his stomach. There are three rolls of bandages and two fresh rolls of absorbent cotton and—"

The doctor repeated his question:

"What was it you gave him?"

Smith answered in a sepulchral tone of deep despair: "It was boracic acid. Do you think you can save him?"

The doctor paused with an expression of disappointment on his face.

"Boracic acid? Umm-mm-mm. How much of it did you give him?"

"I think it was a teaspoonful," mourned Smith. "Is there any hope?"

"No-o, I hardly think—"

"Oh, don't say that—don't tell me my baby—" wept Mrs. Smith.

"No-o; I was just going to say, I don't know as that would hurt him particularly. Might cause a slight disturbance. What else—how much other stuff was there to dilute the boracic?"

"Nine ounces of ten-per-cent milk, one and one-half ounces each of milk-sugar, and lime-water, twenty ounces of boiled water." Smith rattled off the well-known formula automatically.

The latter portion of the receipt had to be delivered in a roar. They had entered the room where the small patient was making known his distaste with things as they are.

Whether he was dangerously poisoned or not, he was highly uncomfortable.

His clothes had been removed, and replaced with an assortment of pink and blue blankets, from which a very red head and a very loud noise proceeded.

"Um-mm-mmph!" grunted the physician again, rather louder than the former grunt. "How many feedings of this mixture with boracic acid have you given?"

Smith looked at his wife. She looked at him.

"I put the acid in this morning's preparation," Smith explained.

"Why," exclaimed his wife, "I haven't given him any of that yet. He didn't wake up till half past ten, and just as I got the bottle warmed to give him, your telegram came."

Mrs. Smith's voice rose with the color in her fair cheeks.

"And you, Tom Smith, made me all this trouble—made me take all the skin off his poor little stomach for nothing. You wretch—you—"

"A little sweet oil and cotton will fix that all right, Mrs. Smith," broke in the doctor. "I guess all I can do is to tell you to mix him some food and give it to him. By the way, did you try that sugar of magnesia I told you to get yesterday?"

He had to wait for a reply. Smith's jaw had dropped to an angle where speech was impossible. At last he came to sufficiently to stammer in a hoarse whisper:

"Sugar of magnesia—sugar of magnesia—why—why—why, that was the

extra powder I put in this morning. I knew I had added something. I—I thought—I forgot the magnesia, and thought it must be boracic acid."

Five minutes later, Baby Smith, his rather raw stomach wrapped in oil and cotton, clothed, and in his right mind, so far as he had any, was peacefully pulling at the rubber nipple of a warm, white bottle. Mrs. Smith was gradually coming around under treatment with another bottle—of porter.

Mr. Smith had started to see the doctor to his automobile, and found the boy, disgruntled over the interruption, just where the Indian ambush began to fire upon the fugitive hero and heroine. The doctor's chauffeur got the machine cranked up as Smith finished signing for the second of his telegrams.

"Say, Mr. Smith," the physician paused to utter, and his tone was very grave and earnest, "what became of that nurse I recommended to you?"

"Why," explained Smith, "there was so little for her to do—I suppose my wife gave her a day off."

"Well, look here! When she gets back, you give her my prescriptions for that baby's food. And you let her make them, and take care of him—wash him, dress him, feed him—and *all* the rest. Do that, or get another doctor to look out for your family. Do you understand?"

Smith said he understood. Then the doctor told his chauffeur to proceed on his way home.

NOT FOR SALE.

By ELBERT D. WIGGIN,

Author of "Nobody's Fool."

The series of misadventures set on foot for one Austrian lieutenant of hussars after he had fallen in with an American party of three.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHERE THE CHASE ENDED.

CAXTON'S breezy personality and democratic way had won him the favor of his keepers, and he was granted a good many privileges about the prison,

being, indeed, allowed within certain limits to do just about as he chose.

One of these privileges was the freedom of the corridor, and he had occupied a good part of the time during his incarceration in walking up and down it for exercise, or halting before one of the

* Began February ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

cells to engage its inmate in welcome conversation.

This last afternoon of his stay, however, he had little to say to any of his fellow prisoners, being entirely engaged in a consideration of the problem which he had set for himself with Muriel.

Up and down the restricted space he paced accordingly, his eyes bent upon the floor, his hands clasped meditatively behind his back; but the harder he thought, and the more he cudgelled his brains, the farther away seemed any plan which appealed to him as at all feasible.

At last, out of his very desperation, a whimsical idea suggested itself. Why not take counsel of one of these criminals by whom he was surrounded? Their lives were spent in the continual effort to evade detection and pursuit. Who, then, more likely to comprehend the wiles and feints to which Von Altdorff would resort, and how best to circumvent them?

Was it not an old axiom, "Set a rogue to catch a rogue"?

The more he dwelt upon the notion the more sensible did it appear; so he finally decided to try it, and after mentally running over in his mind the various prisoners, to determine which one most closely resembled Von Altdorff in type, he selected as his mentor a hardened ruffian, known to local fame as *Der Schnable*, from the size of his nose.

Der Schnable was a churlish, scowling blackguard, who, according to the police, stood ready to commit any crime for the sake of a few florins, and who, in fact, had been charged at various times with about every offense in the calendar; but so wily had he proven himself in his evil-doing, and so well did he recognize the advisability of keeping a still tongue in his head, that often as he had been arrested he had never yet suffered a conviction.

He was in jail now upon suspicion of complicity in a particularly flagrant highway robbery, which had taken place on one of the main avenues a few evenings before; but secure in the knowledge that the authorities had no real proof against him, he had resisted all attempts to extort a confession from him in the Austrian equivalent for the "third degree," and now, still wrapped in his mantle of

disdainful silence, was serenely awaiting his inevitable release.

Constantly on guard, he was never known to speak to the keepers or, indeed, to any of his fellow prisoners, save in an occasional growling monosyllable; but no one could resist Caxton's blithe face and engaging greeting, and, to the surprise of the entire prison, *Der Schnable* had the day before returned a gruff "Good morning" to the American's salutation.

With this as an entering wedge, and the exchange of cigarette papers and tobacco to facilitate friendly feelings, Caxton bravely assaulted the fellow's impenetrable reserve and, before they parted, actually led him into quite a little chat—mainly one-sided, it is true, but nevertheless responded to with a certain hesitating amiability.

Only indifferent subjects had been touched upon then, of course, and whether the man would discuss questions of a professional character was very problematic. Still, Caxton told himself that he could but try, and he was certain that if *Der Schnable* would consent to open up, a very mine of criminal strategy would be exposed to him.

He had, too, one very strong point of vantage; for he had learned in the previous interview that the rascal was very curious about America, having a more or less well-defined idea of, emigrating thither, in order, as he said, to escape the persecution of the police.

Therefore, in accosting him again, Caxton led the talk diplomatically to his native land, and dilated enthusiastically upon the success which might await an ambitious foreigner there, especially if backed up by so rich and influential a personage as himself.

"I'll have a line of immigration officers stretched out clear across New York Bay to intercept him, if he ever ventures to start," he muttered under his breath; "but, Heaven forgive me, I've got to pretend now that we would regard him as an original prize package."

"Why, by Jove!" he exclaimed aloud, "I wouldn't be surprised, old man, to see you on the New York police force within a month or two after you land. Wouldn't that be a jolt to these folks over here that have been running you

down, and continually giving you the worst of it?"

"Ah!" *Der Schnable* showed his blackened fangs in a gratified smile. "That would please me well, *mein herr*. A policeman, eh? A detective? Ah, yes, I should make a fine success at that."

"Do you believe so? Well, now, come to think it over, I'll bet you would. And, by the way," carelessly, "I wonder if you couldn't help me out on a little problem in that line I've been puzzling over quite a good deal."

"About a month ago, you must understand, a friend of mine mysteriously disappeared. The general public believe that he left of his own free will—eloped, in fact; but I know that he was assaulted by two men, and carried away a prisoner to another part of the city."

There was a quick, involuntary twitch of the listener's shoulder, and his glance recoiled for just the fraction of a second.

"I am afraid I could make nothing of such a case," he muttered. "It is too long ago, and—"

"Oh, no; it is not," rejoined Caxton in a low voice, bending sharply toward him; "and you can tell me everything about the case, for you were one of the two men who struck down Laszlo Chegnay in the alley of the Burg Theater!"

It did not require a brick house to fall upon the keen-witted young New Yorker, in the way of driving home a point to his brain. A moment before he had not held the slightest suspicion that the man in front of him had been concerned in the outrage; now he knew it for a truth.

That slight, involuntary twitching of the neck-muscles had told him the truth.

Der Schnable, however, after that one telltale start, had immediately resumed his usual shell of surly taciturnity.

"I know nodings. Go away!" was the only answer he would return to all of Caxton's eager importunities.

It was evident that he now regarded the latter merely as an agent of the police, and the friendly overtures which had been made toward him as merely a new form of lure wherewith to entrap his wary feet.

Nor could all the other's persuasions and arguments serve to swerve him from this conviction. To bribes, threats, entreaties, and promises alike he listened in

scornful unconcern, and still maintained his obstinate silence.

"A thousand florins if you will tell me where you took him," offered Caxton.

No answer.

"Two thousand."

Still no answer.

"Better tell; for I swear that if I find any harm has come to him, I will spend fifty times that amount to send you to the gallows!"

Continued silence.

"Two thousand florins, if you will only tell me the name of the man who hired you."

Der Schnable leisurely stretched himself out on his bunk and, closing his eyes, pretended to sleep.

"Was it Captain von Altdorff?"

A contemptuous snore was the only audible response.

And this was the net result to all of Caxton's further inquiries. In the end he had to desist, and return to his cell with the conviction pretty strongly impressed upon his mind that *Der Schnable* was the finest performer in a purely "thinking part" that he had ever seen.

Yet it was maddening to know that this fellow could tell all, if only some way was discovered to win his confidence. There must be some method of unloosing his tongue.

Yes, he must be made to divulge his knowledge. But how, how, how?

All that evening, and far into the night, Caxton pondered over the problem, debating every possible means of persuasion, from the rack and thumb-screws to the offering of enormous bribes; but, finally, upon his perturbed pillow, there fell a suggestion which seemed to him little short of an inspiration; and, with a sigh of weary relief, he turned over and went to sleep.

Bright and early next morning, a summons came for him to report at the captain's office; and when he reached there he found, to his satisfaction, that his long-awaited release had arrived at last.

"May I ask one question upon leaving, Herr Captain?" he queried deferentially.

"Certainly, *mein herr*. Speak on."

"How long, will you tell me, if it does not conflict with your official regu-

lations, do you expect to hold the prisoner known as *Der Schnable*?"

The captain frowned.

"Just as long as we can, under the charge of suspicion," he retorted crossly. "We have no evidence against him, and will have to discharge him eventually; but while we have him with us we are sure that he is out of mischief."

"But," interposed Caxton, "suppose that evidence could be obtained against him of complicity in a very serious offense? Suppose, let us say, that he had committed a burglary, and was now alarmed over some hints I had let drop, showing that I had a suspicion of his guilt? If he were to be released this morning, would it not be his first impulse to go to those with whom he had stored his booty, and make sure that it is still safe?"

"Ah, I see," slowly. "Then you want—"

"I want this man released this morning, and the moment that he leaves yonder door, a couple of your most expert spies placed upon his trail, with instructions not to lose sight of him for a single minute."

"And you will personally press the charge? It will be burglary, I think you said?"

"It will be almost anything you choose to make it. Enough, at any rate, to 'keep him out of mischief' for several years. And I will press it, all right. Have no fear of that. Oh, yes, I will press it!"

The captain leaned back in his chair, a slow gleam of satisfaction dawning in his eye at the thought of at last triumphing over the crafty *Der Schnable*.

"Very well, *mein herr*," he said crisply. "It shall be as you say."

Accordingly, half an hour or so thereafter, a strange procession wended its way here and there throughout the streets of Vienna.

To the fore, slinking along as though anxious to avoid attention, yet evidently free from any suspicion that he was followed, proceeded *Der Schnable*. Half a block behind came one of the police spies, artistically disguised as a junkman; while still farther back loitered the other, in the rôle of a flower-vender.

And, at the same distance to the rear as this latter man, but holding to parallel streets, marched Tom Caxton, his movements being directed at each corner by the pseudo flower merchant, according to a prearranged code of signals.

Up and down through many streets they passed, and into many different quarters of the town; for *Der Schnable* led them a long and devious chase. But, at last, as though satisfied that no possible danger threatened him, and that he might proceed direct to his destination, he settled into a brisker, less errant gait.

Into the Pestalozzi Strasse he turned, and continued along it for several blocks, to cut at last into a short side street with but one exit.

Caxton, arriving at the corner below, saw the flower merchant beckoning excitedly to him, and came forward upon a run.

Together they sped along the square; then halted sharply, at a gesture from the junkman ahead, and peeped cautiously around the corner into Schwartzenberg Platz.

Der Schnable was just then ascending the steps at the residence of General Chegnay!

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH CHISEL AND MALLET.

"WELL, I'll be jiggered!" gasped Caxton, still hardly able to grasp the solution of the mystery, yet feeling, too, that he should have grasped it long ago.

Plain? It was as plain as a pike-staff to him, now that the key to the riddle was thrust squarely under his nose.

The general, Spartan old father that he was, rather than have his son marry contrary to his wishes, had simply hired two bravos, sent them to a spot where he knew his son was sure to come, caused him to be kidnaped, and was now keeping him locked up until he should agree to comply with the paternal wishes.

This was the meaning of the old count's agitation on the day of Caxton's visit to him; and also of his evasion and hesitation until the American had practically forced him into a lie.

This, too, was the meaning of that interrupted and misunderstood signal which the old servant had tried to give him at the door. The faithful fellow, devoted to Laszlo, no doubt, had attempted to give him some intimation of the truth, and he had been too much of a numskull to take it in.

Yes, that was what he had been from first to last, a numskull! But he would be one no longer. He would have Laszlo out of that house, and back into the arms of his Muriel before one could say Jack Robinson.

By this time *Der Schnable* had finished a short colloquy with old Franz upon the doorstep, and had lurched off up the street; so Caxton, dismissing his police allies, sauntered blithely up to the house, with the same question which had been upon his lips when he was there before.

The gray-haired servitor gave a quick start of recognition upon seeing him again, but almost immediately let fall over his features the deferentially expressionless mask which is the mark of the butler the world over.

"The Count Laszlo Chegnay is not at home, sir," he replied, without a quiver in his face. "He has not been here for some time, and I do not know when he will return."

Caxton thrust forward a quick foot, and held open the door, which the other had started to close.

"You mean," and he mockingly mimicked the man's precise tone, "that the Count Laszlo is home; has been for some time, and you can't tell me when he will depart. Well, I can tell you; he will be leaving here in just about three minutes, or else the whole kit and caboodle of you will be bundled off to the station-house. Now, are you going to stand out of the way and let me go to my friend?"

At that moment, however, there came a harsh, imperative hail from over the banisters.

"Franz," it called, "is that the impudent Yankee who called here the other day and annoyed us so? If it is, tell him if he does not immediately cease his stupid threats and go away from my house, I shall open fire on him from the upper windows with my pistols."

There was a ring of resolution in the

speaker's voice which indicated that he would do exactly as he said; and Caxton, having no desire to be pot-shotted in any such fashion, not unnaturally hesitated.

While he was debating whether to stand his ground or retreat, however, he suddenly noticed that old Franz was distorting his right eye in a peculiar manner, and, at the same time, nodding violently with his head toward the adjacent street corner.

Taking these signs, therefore, as an invitation to a rendezvous, and reflecting that discretion is ever the better part of valor, he parleyed no longer; but, withdrawing from the inhospitable doorstep with as much dignity as he could master, took his stand around the corner to await developments.

Nor did he find that he had been mistaken in his reading of the signals; for, presently, almost before he had got well settled down to his vigil, Franz came trotting along with a market-basket upon his arm.

"Are you really a friend to my young master, sir?" he questioned, peering into Caxton's face as though he would read his very soul.

"As good a one as he will ever have. my man; and prepared to be a friend to you, too, if you will help me get him out of that house. Come now, tell me just where he is confined, and what is the best way of getting to him?"

"Oh, sir, don't ask me that!" and the old servant began to tremble violently. "I can answer no questions. I can tell you nothing. The old master compelled all of us to take a binding and terrible oath that we would disclose none of the affairs of the family to any outsider."

Caxton began to lose patience.

"All right, then. So much the worse for him, and you, too. The only thing left for me is to call in the help of the police."

Old Franz drew himself up with a touch of arrogance.

"You talk nonsense," he said. "The police would not dare to invade the residence of General Chegnay. A civil writ might possibly get you in some time; but that would doubtless take several weeks."

From his own recent experience, the American had no doubt that it would; and he saw, too, that the butler was speaking from an intimate familiarity with local customs, when he so contemptuously denied any fear at the threat of calling in the police.

"What am I to do, then?" demanded Caxton, almost desperately.

A shrewd gleam came into the other's eye.

"I thought the American gentleman might perhaps be looking for lodgings," he said significantly.

"Lodgings?"

"Yes, there are some excellent ones immediately next door to us. If I might venture a suggestion, I would recommend the back room on the third floor."

"Ah, I begin to see. The windows in that room; are they adjacent to the windows in your house, or is there any passage between them up over the roofs?"

"Alas, *mein herr*; our windows are very tightly barred and shuttered, and there is no passage of any kind between the two houses."

"Then why the dickens should I want to take this room you speak of? You don't expect me to break down the wall, do you?"

"If the American gentleman should care to amuse himself in that way," rejoined Franz discreetly, "I have an excellent cold chisel and mallet, which I would be pleased to lend him; and I shall also be most happy to assist him in the work."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" again ejaculated Caxton; and then he began to laugh. "That must certainly have been a peach of an oath that the old gentleman made you swear, friend; but it all goes to show the truth of the old saying, that there's more than one way of killing a cat. On the whole, I guess your scheme is as good as any I can frame up; so, if you will bring along the 'excellent cold chisel and mallet,' I'll rent the room, and we can proceed to our diversions."

He spoke less lightly of the task, though, before the day was done; for it proved to be a long and tiresome job, that of making a breach in the solid masonry of those old-fashioned walls,

even with two of them to help; and the work was rendered more onerous by the necessity for keeping down any undue amount of noise.

Indeed, Caxton's blistered palms would more than once have tempted him to stop, had there not come an occasional tap-tap from the other side of the partition to show him that his efforts were being eagerly watched in that direction.

The afternoon waned; the daylight faded, and night came on; but still the two strange companions worked steadily, energetically away. Caxton asked many questions; but to them all the old man returned the invariable shuddering reply, that he had "taken an oath"; and the American's curiosity remained unsatisfied.

What would meet them on the other side of that wall, Caxton kept wondering? Was it only Chegnay that they had set out to rescue, or was the woman known as Jay Van Brunt there, also?

Then, too, was Chegnay in good health, able to leave without assistance when the time should come; or had he been injured at the time of his abduction, and now in shape requiring a vehicle or ambulance? But, to all these queries, old Franz returned never a word.

At times, too, Caxton questioned in his own heart whether he might not simply be walking into a trap cunningly baited for him by the general and Franz; and, although he was not afraid of any bodily injury, he wavered a little at the thought of what Austrian law might do to him for so bold an invasion into the premises of one of the aristocrats.

But, at last, the partition was all down to a mere intervening shell; and, with a sudden impulse, the American threw his weight quickly against it, and brought the whole thing down with a crash which echoed through both houses like a crack of doom.

For a moment his vision was obscured by the clouds of dust and mortar; and then he recognized, with a thrill of relief, that he had not wrought in vain; for through the aperture, with outstretched hand, stepped Laszlo.

"We must hurry, though," the Austrian exclaimed. "My father is already thundering at my door, and he will break in by another minute. *Ach, himmel!*"

interrupting himself sharply. "And I almost forgot something!"

As he spoke, he dived hurriedly back through the hole; and when he reappeared again, he was clasping a bulky manuscript to his breast.

"It is my opera," he exclaimed simply. "I have had plenty of time to finish it, all alone here with my thoughts, and I ended it to-day. It would have been an irreparable loss if I had left that behind; but I am ready now. Come, let us go!"

It was, indeed, time that they should fly; for to the general's crashing blows against the door, and vociferous threats, was now added a clamor for the police from the other dwelling.

Caxton threw open the door to his room, and disclosed his landlady and a group of women in the hall outside, all shrieking at the top of their voices.

He made no attempt to explain matters to her; but, simply thrusting a roll of bills into her hand, seized Chegnay by the arm and hurried him down the stairs.

Out of the house they dashed, then, through the crowd gathering outside; and, just as a couple of *gens d'armes* started for them, they leaped into a passing cab and were whirled away.

Of course, there was but one destination for either of them; and equally of course, their tongues ran like mad, in questions and explanations, all the way to the hotel. But a sudden silence fell on both when they arrived at the millionaire's apartments and found father and daughter both away.

"Do you know where Miss Muriel has gone?" questioned Caxton of the maid who had met them.

"Oh, yes, sir. Captain Von Altdorff called for her, in great excitement, about ten minutes ago, and she left with him!"

CHAPTER XX.

SOLFERINO BREAKS ANOTHER RECORD.

VON ALTDOFF!

For a moment the two men stood gazing at each other in consternation.

Caxton had told Laszlo, in the cab coming along, of the painful scene between Van Brunt and the gray mus-

tached captain, and of the almost insane fury into which the latter had been goaded by the knowledge that Muriel had been won by another; so that now there was but one thought in both their minds.

The man, crazed by his hopeless yearning, was attempting to secure by craft and force the prize which had been denied to his suing.

He had lured the girl away, upon some pretext or another—madmen are always most plausible in their explanations—and now, having her in his power, was planning to carry her off, and force her into marrying him.

In America, such a supposition, upon the grounds they had, would have seemed exaggerated and absurd; but here in the passionate south, where men's minds were still attuned to the measure of feudal times, and where they themselves had just been concerned in abductions, mysteries, and rescues of quite the sixteenth century pattern, it seemed the most natural conclusion in the world.

Stricken speechless, therefore, at the news, and at the dire possibilities involved, they stood staring at each other, aghast, for the space of half a dozen breaths. Then, seized by a common impulse, they turned together, and hastened wildly down the street.

Up and down they gazed eagerly; but nowhere in sight could they descry any sign of either the captain or his companion. Then, while they stood at a loss, uncertain what next to do, a high-pitched, foppish voice broke on their ears; and Horowitz, who had been lounging in front of the hotel, advanced airily with outstretched hand toward Laszlo.

"Why, my dear Chegnay," he exclaimed loftily, taking no notice whatever of Caxton. "When did you return? Ah, but you took us all by surprise, you clever dog. And now you are a staid old benedict, of course. Back from the delights of the honeymoon to get papa's blessing, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

But Laszlo hoarsely cut in upon his bantering.

"Have you seen anything of Von Altdorff?" he demanded, gripping the other by the shoulder with an intensity which caused the little man to wince.

"Von Altdorff? Why, certainly. He left here only a few moments ago with the charming Miss Bonner. They got into a carriage which was waiting, and drove away like the very dickens. I was just wondering what it all meant, and why—"

"Drove off?" snapped Caxton. "In what direction?"

Horowitz fixed his eye-glasses, and rewarded the interruption with a cold and haughty stare.

"I have not the honor of your acquaintance, Yankee," he started to say insultingly; but, seeing a dangerous gleam come into the American's eyes, he skipped nimbly to the other side of Chegnay, and addressed his remark to him.

"As I was telling you, my dear Laszlo," he observed hastily, "Von Altdorff and Miss Bonner drove away together in a carriage; and where do you think they went? To the Arsenal, of all places in the world. And at this time of night, too. What do you suppose it can possibly mean?"

"To the Arsenal?" incredulously.

"Yes, sir. I don't wonder that you are surprised. But it is nevertheless the truth. I distinctly heard him give the order to the *kutscher*. 'To the Arsenal,' he said, and—"

But already the other two had ceased to pay any attention to him.

"Shall we take a carriage or motor-car?" the American was questioning sharply. "A motor, I guess, by all means?"

"No," swiftly decided Laszlo; "horses. We do not know where the trail may lead, and a motor might get stalled. We can get good mounts at the stable just back of the hotel; indeed, my own horse, Solferino, is there."

The colloquy had taken scarcely half a second, and almost before the last word was out the two had turned and were making for the stable on a run, leaving poor Horowitz, his curiosity piqued and unsatisfied, to turn over a dozen new queries in his buzzing brain, and annoy almost every one who came by with his agitated demands for an explanation.

Meanwhile, the horses were being led out and saddled, although all too slowly for Chegnay's impatience; and, indeed,

the last girth was hardly buckled before he had vaulted into his seat and given an ardent "*Vorwaerts!*" to his willing steed.

Then, *rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat*, came the clang of iron-shod hoofs upon the pavement, and the two were off along the wide avenues, and under the glare of the electric lamps, in a surging gallop.

Caxton was something of a horseman himself, having spent a good part of his youth upon a Western ranch; but he was free to confess that he had never seen such an exhibition of riding as was given by his companion that night.

Chegnay and the splendid animal he bestrode seemed to be one creature, the horse sensing as though by instinct the wishes of his master in regard to speed and direction, and requiring hardly a word or the slightest pressure upon the bridle-rein.

Eyes straight ahead, his clear-cut, handsome profile gleaming like marble in the white glow of the arc-lamps, possessed of but one purpose, to overtake and win at any hazard, the lover rode like a veritable unleashed demon, whirling heedlessly around corners, dashing in and out between trolley-cars, cabs, and automobiles at unchecked speed, risking life and limb a dozen times at the chance of a slip upon the asphalt or a stumble across the car-tracks.

At almost every corner policemen held up excited batons, and a constant mutter of curses from drivers and chauffeurs followed in their wake; but Chegnay never slackened pace nor drew rein at any of the interruptions.

His one cry to Solferino was *Vorwaerts!*—the one passion of his soul, *Vorwaerts!* Ever and always, *Vorwaerts!*

And the gallant chestnut responded well to his demand. Head grandly up, eye flashing, all his muscles of whipcord and steel in magnificent play, Solferino swept onward like a meteor—twisting, turning, evading obstacles sometimes by scarcely more than a hairsbreadth, yet easily, gracefully, without a misstep, and never for one moment losing his splendid stride.

Caxton followed as best he could upon his inferior mount. A dozen times his heart was in his throat, when his com-

panion would essay some especial hazard ; but he was ashamed not to venture where the other so daringly led, and by pure miracle, so it seemed to him, he escaped unscathed.

Now, however, they had passed beyond the fortifications, the limits of the old town, and were on freer, less encumbered streets, where the risks were less constant and the going easier than on the slippery asphalt.

Caxton ranged up beside his comrade and, by the active use of spur and whip, managed to keep his sweating beast upon more even terms with Solferino, who, for all his charging rush, had not yet turned a hair. It was hard work, though, at the best his mount could do ; for ever at more and more frequent intervals Laszlo would give his sharp, impatient cry of *Vorwaerts!* " and the chestnut would answer with a new and more surprising burst of speed.

At last, however, the end—at least, the end of their first stage—was in sight. Up a little ascent they tore, and down in the hollow beneath them they could see the dark mass of buildings which form the square of the Arsenal.

Usually, at night the place was gloomy and deserted ; but this evening, to their surprise, it presented a scene of the greatest activity. The wide yard, with its row of sheds for the housing of Von Altdorff's ballrooms, was all alight with the glow of arc-lamps, and a crowd of workmen could be seen in the center about the huge gas-bag of the largest one, which, fully inflated, swayed unsteadily and tugged hard at its moorings.

And then, as Caxton and Chegnay stared with uncomprehending eyes, they saw the crowd scatter back, and in the broad illumination beheld Von Altdorff and Muriel advance and take their places in the basket.

A murmur of voices was borne to their ears, the bark of a sharp, authoritative order ; then the men scattered still farther back, and the restraining ropes were let go.

Up into the air shot the big, cigar-shaped bag, with its dangling cordage and human freight. The staccato cough of its motor hummed out upon the air, the propeller began slowly to revolve. They were off !

A passionate cry of remonstrance burst from Laszlo's lips, as though it had been torn from his very heart. The hand which held the whip he never used upon Solferino rose in a quick gesture, and came down in a sharp, stinging cut across the mettlesome creature's flank.

Resenting the unaccustomed punishment, the horse sprang forward like an arrow shot from a bow.

Down the little declivity he fairly bolted, his head swinging wide at every leap—a blind, plunging whirlwind of wrath and protest and speed.

It was useless for Caxton to attempt to follow. He could but sit his horse at the top of the hill, and gaze in stupefied wonder at the swift unfolding of events.

What Chegnay intended to do he could not divine ; indeed, it is doubtful if the Austrian had any distinct idea himself. His lover's heart simply realized that its idol was being carried away from him, and he acted upon the impulse of one who feels that he must do something. Something, no matter how hopeless the outcome !

The air-ship, Caxton saw, had not yet answered to its power, but, carried by the wind, drifted low over the squat buildings of the Arsenal, and out toward the road, its drag-rope trailing behind it like a serpent held in the talons of some gigantic bird of prey.

Out over the road the vessel drifted, then started to lift, just as Chegnay and Solferino whirled toward it, with a clatter of charging hoofs.

Like a flash, Laszlo saw his opportunity. Every instant the balloon was mounting higher ; the end of the drag-rope now dangled above the height of a man's head.

"*Springe!*"

The lieutenant's hands, gathering up the reins, gripped down like a vise on either side of his horse's neck. Solferino, almost running away, yet knew the familiar signal too well to disobey.

He caught himself at the very beginning of another leap and, bunching his mighty muscles, shot upward.

Up, as he had done before—the assembled thousands upon that never-to-be-forgotten Field Day. Up, like the uncoiling of a watch-spring. Up, and still up, in one magnificent spectacular effort !

And, at the very summit of it, Laszlo kicked his feet free of the stirrups, let go his clenching hold upon the bridle and, with outstretched hands, seized and clung to the dangling drag-rope, which switched just within his reach.

The chestnut, unexpectedly relieved of his burden, came down to earth with an awkward thud, stumbling and slipping, but regained his footing and, with unchecked speed, galloped away into the darkness.

Caxton, however, from his position upon the hillside had no eyes for him. All his faculties were centered upon the slender, athletic figure of his friend clinging, cat-like, to that swaying rope.

For a second the balloon seemed about to settle under the added weight. It listed unsteadily, curveted, and sank a dozen feet. Then, catching the full effect of its power, together with a slight rising of the wind, it righted and shot upward toward the stars!

CHAPTER XXI.

'TWINT EARTH AND SKY.

AH, it is well sometimes to be a trained athlete, with sinews hardened to endurance, and a brain accustomed to the quick calculation of chances in an emergency.

Laszlo had entertained no other idea when he seized the drag-rope but that his weight would bring the balloon to earth, and that he could hold it there by sheer strength until he had secured an accounting from Von Altdorff and rescued Muriel.

Now, however, as he felt himself lifted like a feather by the expanding pressure of the gas and, glancing down, saw the earth dropping away from him as though it were tumbling into space, he gave himself up for lost.

He turned sick and giddy with that one downward look, and not daring to cast his eyes in that direction again, closed them, hanging meanwhile, weak and nerveless, to the slowly gyrating rope.

His very terror, though, was, in a way, a stimulus to him; for feeling his flaccid grip relax upon the strands, and his fingers slowly slipping, his peril sent

new energy coursing through him, and he fastened upon that cord with a clutch of desperation.

But this, he knew, could not last long. Presently his muscles would give way under the strain, his hold would become weakened, and then would come the end, with that awful plunge downward. His brain reeled before the horror of his impending fate.

No, he determined fiercely, he would not sell his life so cheaply. There is always a way out of every pass, if one has but the capability to see it, and the resolution to act.

Nerving himself to the experiment, he again cautiously dropped his glance earthward. No help there. They were evidently several hundred feet above *terra firma*, and mounting higher every moment.

Hastily he raised his glance again, and took a deep breath, gripping the rope now until the veins stood out in lumps upon his hands. That downward look, prepared for it though he had been, had nearly proved his undoing, and he saw he must attempt it no more.

What was there to do, then? Could he clamber up the rope and reach the car swinging lightly above him? Hitherto he had hung supine, in order to relieve as much as possible the pull upon his arms.

Did he have the strength, in his unstrung condition, to climb that length of twisting rope, and support himself like a fly upon the under side of the car until he could work up over the edge?

It seemed impossible; but—and Chagnay gritted his teeth—it *had* to be done.

Even in that moment of shuddering fear, however, Laszlo took time to think upon the possible danger of his undertaking to the woman he loved. Would his attempt be apt to tilt the car in which she sat, and possibly precipitate her out into space?

He noted the arrangement of the cords by which it was held, and decided that that chance might be safely risked.

All these reflections and inward debates take time in the telling; but, as a matter of fact—although it seemed centuries long to Laszlo—it was not more than forty seconds or a minute at the outside from the moment that he had

first clutched the drag-rope until he was swarming up it hand over hand.

Exercise of this sort had been one of his favorite "stunts" at gymnasium practise, but he found it a very different thing to negotiate a rope whirling as a tail to a flying balloon from ascending the same length upon one firmly attached, and with a net underneath in case of accident.

Nevertheless, under the circumstances, he made what must be considered excellent progress, and was beginning to flatter himself on his advance, when suddenly he sustained another shock which again nearly sent him tumbling, and so once more left him shaking and inert.

As he was hauling himself up with careful skill, every faculty intent upon his feat, a voice spoke to him from above.

He opened his eyes and glanced toward the car, but, on account of the darkness, could make out no one leaning over. Nor, although the voice continued to speak, he could not distinguish, such was the pounding of the blood in his ears, a single word which was said.

He supposed, however, that it must be an admonition from Von Altdorff, and wondered, with a new apprehension, if it might perhaps be a threat from his enemy.

All along he had recognized that he must have assistance from those in the car in order to accomplish his project; but now it struck him, with dire significance, that the air-ship's pilot was his sworn foe, a madman crazed with jealousy of him.

Still, even a fiend would hardly refuse the hand of succor to a fellow-being in such a predicament; and, in any event, he could be no worse off than he was at present. He must simply hope for the best, and go ahead.

Therefore, he resumed his arduous climb.

Now, as a matter of fact, Von Altdorff had just discovered the presence of the other on the rope at the moment he spoke, and his utterance had been an excited adjuration to hold on at any cost.

He had not the slightest idea who Chegnay was, for, absorbed in the ticklish business of starting off, neither he nor Muriel had observed that wild dash

of Solferino's down into the valley, and he had simply ascribed the jerk of the car, when Laszlo caught hold, to the snarling of the drag-rope against some obstruction.

It was only, indeed, when the car began to bob about under the stress of the other's energetic climbing, that he realized at last there was a stowaway upon the voyage. Then he at once started to render every assistance in his power.

And Chegnay, in truth, was now in sore need.

His strength was rapidly failing. He could no longer advance an inch; his arms felt as though they were being torn out by the roots; his hands were cramping so that he must soon let go.

An awful horror of that empty void below surged over him; a black haze seemed to rise before his eyes and muffle him in its folds. For a moment he thought he was really falling. Then his vision cleared, and a harbinger of hope twinkled encouragingly to his glance. It was a tiny lantern slung over the side, in order to give him light for his adventure.

He saw, too, that a strand of rope, with a plummet on the end, was being swung toward him pendulum-wise; and although it required all his resolution to make the attempt, he finally summoned up bravery enough to let go for a moment with one hand and grab the line as it swished by.

To his delight, it proved to be a slip-noose, and when he had succeeded in adjusting this under his shoulders, and felt a firm pull of support on it from above, the nothingness beneath seemed suddenly to lose half its terror for him.

His strength came back with a bound. He felt fresh and alert again; in fact, the moral support of that cord far exceeded all the physical advantages he gained from it.

Still, even with all the assistance that could be rendered him, his was still far from being any holiday job, and when he finally drew himself up to the rim of the basket, it is doubtful if there was another ounce of exertion left in his entire frame. Von Altdorff, putting Muriel at the other side to balance the weight as much as possible, reached out and, grasping

him under the arms, dragged him into safety.

Then he lifted his lantern to the sweating, haggard face of the man he had rescued, to see whom it might be, but there was a startled gasp behind him from Muriel, and, with a glad cry of "Laszlo! Laszlo!" he saw her gather the stranger in her arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN FRIENDLY CLASP.

"CHEGNAY?" incredulously demanded the captain of the air-ship.

Laszlo, faint and exhausted though he was, straightened up and threw one arm protectingly about Muriel's shoulder.

"Yes; Chegnay," he panted. "Here, at any cost, to demand where you are taking my affianced wife!"

He looked so fierce, so ready to spring upon the other in a savage outburst, that Muriel hurriedly thrust herself between them.

"But, Laszlo, Laszlo," she protested eagerly, "you are making a great mistake. I am going with Captain von Altdorff of my own free will. There are excellent reasons for—"

"No doubt," sneeringly. "But I do not think those 'excellent reasons' of his will satisfy me. He will have to explain more fully why he has tried to put this shame upon an honorable woman, and the one, too, to whom I am betrothed."

"Hush, Laszlo," and she placed an imperatively silencing hand against his lips. "We have all cruelly misjudged Captain von Altdorff, and you are still doing so. He has intended no injury to me, and he is in great trouble. He is taking me to the death-bed of the woman he loves as much as you do me."

"Yes, it is the girl you knew as Joy Van Brunt, but who is really Muriel Bonner, the actress. He has loved her, and only her all the time; and now she is lying alarmingly ill, with but faint hope for her recovery. She sent for me to come to her, and that is why I have accompanied him upon this trip."

"And you believe such a trumped-up story?" broke in her lover, frankly skeptical. "Why—"

But again she laid her hand upon his mouth.

"I have the letter in her own handwriting," she said.

Then she drew him a little to one side.

"It is a long story you have to hear, dear," she continued, a touch of gentle reproof in her tone. "Full of, misconceptions and misunderstandings—yes, and of follies, perhaps; but it will do no good to your comprehension of it constantly to interrupt, or to scout at the truth of everything in it which may sound strange to you. So, you must listen quietly until the end, and then you can either believe or disbelieve, as you see fit. But, if I know you rightly, you will decide at its conclusion that a sincere apology is due from you to Captain von Altdorff."

Accordingly, his hand tucked in hers, he kept silence while she unfolded to him a revelation of all that had taken place.

She told him first of the interchange of identities between herself and her cousin and of the reasons which had brought it about; and although he had heard it all from Caxton before, he would not mar the sweetness of her confession by letting her know for a moment that it was a twice-told tale.

Then, when suitable absolution and forgiveness had been granted under cover of the darkness, she took up the story of "Joy's" love-affair, and showed him plainly that there had never been any real question of rivalry between himself and Von Altdorff.

"He has loved her from the beginning," said Muriel, "just as you have loved me; and when he believed, from papa's blundering answer, that he had lost her, he was roused to a pitch of jealous frenzy, just as you would have been if you thought you had lost me."

"She came to the Arsenal that very morning and, unfortunately, saw fit to coquette with him. A balloon was shortly to be sent up. Roused almost to the point of distraction, maddened by her seeming rebuffs, he induced her to enter the basket; then took her aloft with him, and carried her away. None but a few of his workmen were about, and he could trust them to keep silence."

"He took her to an estate of his, a

lonely place in the mountains, near Gmunden, and left her there in the charge of his housekeeper. She pretended to be incensed with him for carrying her off that she would not listen to his protestations; and he left, telling her that he would return to Vienna, get a priest, and marry her by force. That was the very thing she wanted him to do, as a matter of fact; for she did not dare risk confessing to him who she really was, and she had been trying by her assumed coldness to spur him to this very point.

"But richly have they both had to pay for their follies," Muriel continued, with a sad shake of her head. "His air-ship, the only one he had capable of making a distance as far as Gmunden, broke down upon the return journey; and since his estate is in a wild spot, inaccessible to either telegraph or telephone, he was unable to send any word.

"Then she, believing that he had deserted her, fell into violent hysterics, lasting a day and night, and when he did finally get back he found her raving in the delirium of brain-fever.

"Since that time his condition has been a pitiable one. He knew that he was shadowed by our detectives, and has lived constantly in fear of being arrested for the crime of her abduction. He has not dared to go to Gmunden. News from there has reached him but slowly; and between fearing for her, and fearing the consequences of his mad act, his life has been one continual inferno.

"Last night he could stand it no longer, however, but risked everything and took the trip and, to his joy at first, he found her conscious. Conscious, and in a more chastened, sweeter humor than he had ever known.

"She still refused, though, to receive his vows of love until she had completely unboomed herself of all the story of her deceptions. And, when he had assured her that none of it made any difference to his affection, she fell then to weeping and, confessing that she too loved him, yet told him that it could never be, since the doctor had shortly before informed her that she would probably not get well.

"She urged him, also, to carry a letter to me, and although it tore his heart to

leave her, he did so. In it she asked me to come to her, if possible; but, whether I did so or not, to see that he was fully absolved from all blame in connection with her disappearance or death.

"I, of course, agreed to comply with her request, and merely stopping to leave a hasty note for papa, hurried back with Captain von Altdorff to the Arsenal. The rest you know."

The conversation between Laszlo and Muriel had been carried on almost in whispers at one side of the car; but now as she finished, and Chegnay glanced somewhat curiously at the figure of their pilot, the thought struck him that they might have screamed at the top of their voices, for all the difference it would have made to him.

Entirely oblivious of them, he was leaning forward over the front of the car, now adjusting a lever, now tightening a belt, his one thought to get the most speed out of his delicate and complicated machinery, his eyes only turning from the steady beat of his engines to gaze with strained yearning toward Gmunden.

It was daylight when at last they arrived, the peaks all about them tinged with the rosy light of dawn.

To the south towered the lofty Dachstein, with its little glacier and cap of virgin snow, and nearer at hand, toward the left, loomed up the rugged mass of the Traunstein, while the foreground was filled up with the pine-covered Salzburg Alps, through a ridge in which rushed the Traun, foaming in cascade after cascade down to meet the Danube.

Upon one of the wildest, most desolate summits the air-ship settled slowly, and Von Altdorff, only his haggard eyes showing the anxiety which was gnawing at his heart, assisted his passengers to alight, and led them hurriedly over a rocky path through the pine forest back to the house, a mere shooting-box erected many years before.

On tiptoe, scarcely knowing what to expect, for the housekeeper was with the invalid, and nobody else about, they followed him to the sick-chamber, and just as they entered saw the sun break through the eastern window in a flood of golden glory.

It shone full upon the pallid face

of the sick woman, sending a thousand glints into her waving hair, and giving a delicate, spiritual beauty to her face which she had hitherto lacked.

The old dame in attendance rose quickly to draw the shade; but Joy already had opened her eyes, and was gazing with rapturous, half-incredulous glance at Von Altdorff.

"Oh, Felix, Felix!" she cried, "I have been waiting and longing for you so, to tell you the good news. Love is a wonderful medicine, my own, and the doctor now tells me that I shall get well."

Muriel touched Laszlo upon the hand and, making a sign to the old woman, the three of them withdrew, leaving the ecstatic pair alone.

A little later the captain came out to them, and one would never have known that he had passed a night of sleeplessness and anguish. He looked as though twenty years had dropped from his shoulders, and he greeted them with a laugh like a boy's.

"My congratulations to you, dear old Felix," cried Chegnay, extending his hand.

"And mine to you," returned Von Altdorff, grasping it with hearty pressure.

So the feud between them was made up.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAXTON'S SECRET.

THERE is a lilting waltz air which has been played, sung, hummed, and whistled by thousands of people, but which still retains its popularity through a quality it possesses of a peculiarly quaint and delicate beauty.

Ask any street-boy for its name, and he will tell you it is the waltz-motif from "For the Red Ribbon"; yet it also remains a marked favorite with connoisseurs and musicians of ability. Even the *table d'hôte* orchestras cannot utterly spoil it.

It has been played in almost every theater in this country and Europe; but the first time it was even rendered was in the Burg Theater, at Vienna, with the composer in the conductor's chair, and his wife taking the stellar rôle.

It was a great occasion, which even

royalty had deigned to honor; for it was rumored that despite the fact it was a new production, it would mark the farewell to the stage of Muriel Bonner, the great Vienna favorite, she having consented to appear for this one night only.

And what a success it was! And what a surprise came on top of it, when it was learned that Muriel Bonner was in reality the daughter of Cyrus Van Brunt, the millionaire, while the real owner of the name was the dashing young lady who a few weeks before had married Captain von Altdorff.

But all that is ancient history. Everybody knows the story of the first production of "For the Red Ribbon," and of the romance which crowned the life of its gifted young composer.

Only one person dissented from the general verdict of praise for the piece at that first production, and of hearty good wishes for the young couple with whom it was associated.

That was Max Horowitz, and he was so resentful of the fact that he had been cheated of spreading this sensation that he was like a viper swelled out with venom.

"Yes," he said superciliously in the foyer, "the critics seem to be applauding a little; but, as for me, I'm free to confess that I never sat through such a bore-some thing in all my life. Then the Yankee actress is so rotten. It's plain to be seen that those stories of her having been drilled like an automaton for 'Mlle. Modiste' are all true. It's certainly lucky for her that she's an heiress, and doesn't have to stay on the stage, and still luckier for Chegnay. He'll never make his salt writing operas."

"Is that so?" cut in Caxton, who happened to have overheard this last remark. "Well, I just heard one of the greatest critics in the world say that he would rather have Chegnay's talent than all of his father-in-law's copper mines; and as for Muriel, there is not now nor ever was a woman who could touch her on the stage, or off of it, either."

"Oh, it's not hard to understand your approval of her," sneered Horowitz. "You are in love with her yourself, and always have been."

"Gee!" reflected the American. "Am I beginning to show it so bad that even

a little cad like this can notice it? If so, it is certainly lucky I am leaving for Columbia's shores to-morrow. What's the use, Caxton? She would never have had you, and that ends the matter."

Aloud, however, his remarks were of a different tenor.

"Look here, shrimp," he said, towering threateningly over the hussar, "if you ever dare to breathe, utter, say, or even think such a thing again I'll come

half-way across the world, and spend six months in jail, just for the pleasure of dusting your pants once more.

"And, oh, Horowitz," he added gloatingly, "what a spanking that will be! What a spanking that will be!"

But the gossip had shrunk back terrified before the flashing eye and sternly set face bent toward him.

"I never will say it, *mein herr*," he shrieked. "I never will even think it."

THE END.

Why Galway Lost His Temper.

By ROBERT RUSSELL.

This man certainly appeared to have some justification for getting mad, but yet—

GALWAY was a very nice fellow, and his friends always forgave the rare outbursts of temper, which were the only evident faults to which he was obliged to plead guilty. It was on one of the hottest days of a hot August that he gave way to this temper under particularly exasperating circumstances.

It was to be a momentous day for him; and as he entered the large jewelry store, for the purpose of having his pocketbook repaired, he was full of anticipation for the evening.

The establishment had manufactured the valuable case, and was one well known throughout the country, boasting a maze of departments. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that Galway did not seek to ascertain the location of the repair counter himself, but accosted a floor-walker for the information.

"At the rear of the store," responded that dignified official.

To the rear, therefore, went the young man. Looking about him in this locality, Galway read all sorts of signs, none of which included the word "Repairs." Being a resolute person, and not to be side-tracked or inclined to shift responsibility, he returned to the front of the store and again addressed the man whom he had previously interviewed.

"What part of the rear contains the repair department?" he asked without the slightest trace of impatience.

"It is directly in the rear," returned the dignitary—"up a flight of stairs."

Back went Galway.

Reaching the very back part of the establishment, he spied a small staircase, and started to ascend it. It was a long flight, and he wondered that an establishment which catered to such a fashionable clientèle would put its patrons to such trouble over a matter of repairs.

At length he reached the top, and was confronted by a row of forbidding doors, and again the sign "Repairs" was missing. Desiring to be sure that the department was not here, and anxious that the slight indignation, which now began to manifest itself, should not be unjustified, Galway spoke to a young man who passed him at that moment.

"I am looking for the repair department," he said rather irritably. "Is it on this floor?"

"No, sir," replied the other; "it is on the floor below, reached by a short stairway—only a few steps up."

"Ah," soliloquized Galway, "it's a wonder that they could not be more explicit."

As he descended the long stairway his impatience gradually rose, so that by the time he gained the ground floor again his vexation, combined with the heat of the day, made him feel a decidedly abused person.

He was very careful, now, to examine the full length of the rear of the store, and at last discovered a short flight of stairs, at the top of which appeared a counter that looked as if it might lend itself to repairing.

Galway presented himself at this counter in due course. His voice was low as he spoke.

"Is *this* the repair department?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"I am glad," commented Galway, "that, after several trips up and down your store, and after mounting innumerable stairs, I have at last found the place I want. It does seem strange that in an establishment like this a man cannot be properly directed in the first place, I—"

"I am very sorry, sir, that you have been put to any inconvenience, and if you will make a complaint at the manager's office, the firm will be under obligation to you. Who directed you wrongly?"

"A greatly overdressed man, who stands at the front of the store, in the first place, and the same individual in the second place. You are the first intelligent employee I have met in the establishment."

"Do as I suggest, sir, and I assure you the person who is responsible will be severely reprimanded. And now, what can I do for you?"

"I have here," said Galway, "a card-case made by your firm, and which I cherish very highly. The lining has worn out, and I have brought it here to be repaired. I trust that you will be as expeditious as possible."

The young man behind the counter took the case in his hands, and held it a moment with a perplexed look on his face. Then he spoke hesitatingly:

"I am very sorry, sir, again to put you to trouble, but, you see, this department does all the repairing except—this fine leather-work. You will find that department on the south side of the building."

It was now that Galway forgot all about the pleasurable evening in store for him, and ceased attempting to control his wrath.

"Again!" he cried. "Whoever heard

of an establishment like this dividing up its departments in that way. Here, you," he called to a young man passing at that moment, "you look as though you had some authority in this place. Tell me the name of the clothes-model who stands at the front of the store, and tell me this man's name who refuses to repair my card-case, and tell me who is the proper person to whom a complaint should be made of carelessness and—"

Of course, Galway carried the thing too far. But remember his temper—and the heat.

The passing young man, whom Galway had grasped by the arm, forcefully removed the hand, and looked at the customer from head to foot.

"If you will be calm a moment," he said slowly, "I will be glad to answer any questions you may ask."

But the fact that the other had actually taken hold of him made Galway more incensed than ever.

"And you might include your own name, also, young man," he exploded. "I am not accustomed to being taken hold of by jewelry salesmen."

"My name is Prentice," replied the other, "and I am hardly a salesman—but that does not matter. If you do not desire to talk reasonably, I will show you to the department which will attend to your card-case—and suggest that you go to Mr. Crofty himself with your complaint. He is at present some fifty miles from any railroad, in the Adirondacks—you might possibly have assumed a rational bearing by the time you reached him. This way, sir."

Galway was a really decent fellow; and as he followed Prentice, muttering that he would immediately leave the place were it not for the fact that Crofty & Co. had made the case, he began to realize that he had been a little hasty.

There was no evidence of repentance in his bearing, however, as he handed over the card-case to the proper person, left his name and address, and quitted the store.

Outside, the sun was blistering hot, and it was not until Galway had somewhat cooled his burning body by means of a cold glass of mineral water that he

again began to think of the pleasure in store for him that evening.

In the spring he had left, at its most interesting stage, an affair of the heart, which was not only his first, but which consumed him with even a greater intensity than his miserable temper. Miss Alling was now to be in town for a week, and he had persuaded her over the telephone to dine with him that evening. Her house was closed for the summer, and he considered it a great honor that she had dropped him a note, asking him to call at the hotel where she was stopping with friends. And he was enthralled when she had so far overlooked the conventionalities as to accept his invitation for dinner.

He was due to call for her at seven. It was now only five, but he hastened to his near-by apartment in order to be punctuality itself, and to remind her that the two months which had passed since he had seen her in nowise changed the intensity of his feelings.

"Let's see," he said to himself, as he entered his room and closed the door, "how long must I allow to reach her hotel?"

He reached for his card-case.

"Oh, of course, I left the case at Crofty's to be fixed— Her hotel is the—the—the—" And the young man stood still—thinking.

"Of course I know it," he went on. "It begins with a 'W'—the Westmoreland—no—the Weland—no, she wouldn't stop there—the—the—" and again the perspiration gathered on Galway's brow.

With a sudden inspiration, he seized the telephone-book, and began searching for all the hotels, the names of which began with "W." Unsuccessful here, he spent many more minutes looking haphazard for the names of other hotels; and finally threw down the book, with the most hopeless ejaculation.

Then he began a search of his pockets for the note which would give the required clue. Nothing to be found—he must have left it in the miserable card-case.

Yes, he was sure of that now; and, after a hasty glance at his watch, he ascertained that with haste he might be able to reach the store before they closed.

Regardless of wilted collar and extremely uncomfortable clothing, he started in hot haste for the establishment of Crofty & Co. The massive front door was just being shut as he got there.

"Closed, sir," said the watchman.

"But I *must* see some one in authority," insisted Galway.

At that moment there emerged from the entrance the well-dressed floor-walker who had been the means of Galway's previous irritation. The latter quickly approached him.

"I left a card-case here this afternoon to be repaired—and it is very necessary that I obtain a paper from it."

"I remember the occasion well," replied the other, "but it is too late now."

"But, it is *most* important—is there no way?"

The dignified young man looked at Galway with something of satisfaction in his eyes.

"No, sir," he said. "Every one has left, and—"

As luck would have it, at that instant, Prentice, who really seemed to be a person in authority in the establishment, appeared from another entrance, and approached the trio.

"Ah," he ejaculated, not with satisfaction, but with interest. "The repair department?"

"Sir," began Galway, now all humility, "I lost my temper this afternoon; but at present I have discovered that I left in the card-case, which is now in your possession, a paper which it is most important I see at once. Will you do me the favor of finding out if it is still there—they cannot have begun work upon the case yet?"

The tall young man looked at Galway with the same calm interest and amusement which had possessed his features when he suggested a trip into the mountains to find Mr. Crofty, and replied good-humoredly:

"We all lose our tempers occasionally. Come with me, and I will see what I can do."

Together they entered the building, and went at once to the repair department which it had taken Galway so long to find. Here they discovered a conscientious workman still laboring over a delicate piece of leather.

The situation was soon explained; and, after a long search, the card-case discovered—empty.

"You must have taken everything out of it, sir," said Prentice.

"I thought I did," admitted Galway; "but when I could not find the paper I wanted, I thought it must be here—but—do you mind telling me all the hotels you know with names beginning with 'W'?"

Prentice looked at Galway in astonishment; and, as they left the building, his sense of humor could no longer withstand the incongruity of Galway's former confident anger, and his present humility. After a quiet laugh, however, he suggested two or three, and then spoke of looking them up in the telephone-book.

"Oh, I've done that," cried the distracted young man. "Thank you for your kindness," he had the grace to add.

Slowly, and with a broken spirit, Galway returned to his apartment. As the clock struck the hour of seven, and he realized that somewhere in that great city the girl of his heart was waiting for him to take her out to dinner, the place had never seemed so desolate.

"Dinner by himself." The thought disgusted him. But, finally, as the same clock was striking the hour of nine, he realized that nature must be fortified; and he rose to go out to partake of some food.

He wanted lights and coolness—to get far away from his accustomed haunts; and he took a car for a distant dining-place on the banks of the river.

There were lights there a plenty; and quiet corners out-of-doors, where he could imagine himself sitting with Miss Alling—and he would be sitting thus, too, as soon as she called him up on the following day to hear his explanation. But he sat alone now, watching the lights on the river, and hearing faintly the low spoken words of the couples occupying the quiet corners.

He had finished his dinner, and was about to leave for his lonely apartment, when he fancied he heard his name spoken. Yes, there it was again, and coming from one of the deliciously shaded dining-places.

With some curiosity, Galway rose and walked in the direction of the sound.

There, sitting where just a ray of the electric lights fell upon her face, sat Helen Alling; and beyond her, in the darkness, a man.

Without a moment's hesitation, Galway spoke to her.

"You must have thought it awfully strange, Helen, that I did not call for you—but I lost your address, and—"

The girl interrupted him.

"I knew it was something like that, and waited till nine o'clock, when I called up your apartment on the telephone. It's all right, of course—we can dine together some other evening—I wanted to tell you something—perhaps I can do it now—but first let me present you—"

All eagerness, Galway bowed to the young man in the darkness, and turned again to the girl.

"First of all, Helen, let me write down the name of the hotel where you are stopping," and he looked in vain for a paper on which to inscribe it.

At last, crumpled up in his trouser's pocket, he found a scrap and hurriedly drew it out.

"It's the Windmere," said the girl—"a new place; not yet even in the telephone-book, but awfully nice. And now let me tell you why I wanted to see you so much. You are my oldest friend in the city—and—and I wanted you to know of my engagement. This," with a little wave of her hand toward the man in the darkness, "is the happy man—"

But Galway was looking at the slip of paper on which he had written the address. It was her note to him bearing her hotel telephone number, on the back of which was written the names of the three culprits of the afternoon. And then he remembered his consuming anger at the moment he had jotted them down—and the last name—was Prentice.

The tall man came out of the darkness.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Galway this afternoon," he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

It was Prentice.

"Good night," said Galway, tearing into little bits the note he had received from Miss Alling.

Then he hurried from the spot.

TRouble IN BUNCHES.*

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "By Bullet Persuasion," "Taking Big Chances," "The Hoodoo Ranch," etc.

A matter of one American obliging another starts with a mistake,
opening the way to crimes, casualties, and catastrophes galore.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRISON AT SANTA ROSA.

THE prison at Santa Rosa was not an imposing piece of architecture, but it was certainly a prison. I had frequently ridden by it in days when I had no idea that I should ever be incarcerated there, and I had felt great sympathy for the poor devils who were prisoners, whether guilty of crime or not.

It was a low, one-story building—at least, only one story above the level of the ground—and was built of adobe blocks. Its cold, unornamented front faced the road that led out along the Rio Rico, and the rear of the prison was on the edge of the river-bank.

The cells, or dungeons as they were called, were, as Balover had written, miserable holes. They had almost no ventilation, and but little light. The principal prisoners were kept in the cells underground, from which there was no escape.

The building surrounded an open court, or *patio*, which would be called in the United States a prison-yard. Here the executions were held.

It was the custom in Santa Rosa, when any great offender was shot, to march all the prisoners out into the *patio* and arrange them on three sides, leaving the blank wall at one end to receive the bullets that did not lodge in the body of the victim.

It was about midnight when we reached the prison. My wounds were now quite painful, and I was so weak I hardly cared what they did with me afterward if they would only let me have a little rest then.

We were admitted, and the head keeper of the place was aroused. He received us in a little office.

"Your name?" he demanded, taking up a large book in which he kept a record of prisoners.

"Robert Fraser," I answered.

"Your business here?"

"In the prison?" I asked.

"In Santa Rosa," he said, with a heavy frown.

"I am a physician and chemist. I was sent here by a New York society to study certain plants and barks."

"And, having been assured of your hospitality, you abused it."

"I did not. I have committed no crime at all."

"Ha! You and your countrymen have strange ideas of crime. We will give you a lesson. We have already your partner in crime. Put them together," he said to another keeper. "Let them console each other. They will leave here together for—"

He did not finish his sentence, but a cold chill ran through me as I realized what he meant."

"I am wounded," I explained. "May I not have some attention?"

"We have no surgeon here. Anyway, a few wounds more or less will make no difference in the end."

With this brutal remark, he waved to the keepers, and I was hustled down a flight of stone steps.

By the light of a lantern a door was unlocked, and I saw Balover lying on a pile of dirty straw in a corner of a filthy cell.

"In with you," said one of the keepers, and in a moment the door was closed and I was left in perfect darkness.

"Balover," I said.

"What! What! Who is that? Is it—it can't be Fraser!" replied Balover.

"It is Fraser," I said.

*Began February ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

"What is it—a plot—a plan to get me out?" he asked eagerly.

"It was to be," I answered. "But, like all the rest of the business, I've made a mess of it. I did leave O'Donnell's camp to come and help you, but I am worse off than you are. I am wounded, and I have lost Don Manuel's money."

"Then, it's all up with you, too," he said.

There was no recrimination—no murmuring nor fault-finding. Balover was as brave a fellow as I had ever seen.

"If you are wounded," he went on, "lie down on this straw. It isn't very clean, nor very dry; but it's better than the floor."

I lay down alongside of him, and so great was my exhaustion that even while he was speaking to me I fell asleep.

When I awoke I saw the miserable condition of the place we were in, and the effect his imprisonment was having on Balover. His eyes were sunken and dim, his cheeks hollow and white, with a sickly look all over his face.

"They don't need to shoot a man here," I remarked. "All that is necessary is to keep him here. He'll die soon enough."

"I wish they'd hurry up and have it over," said Balover. "I see no hope of getting out. In some way these fools have got it into their heads that we are great criminals. You can't drive any sense into them. They are densely ignorant, and hate us for our nationality. I thought all South America liked the States. But Santa Rosa hates us. There is no doubt that I am to be shot. And, as they have put you in with me, I suppose that will be your fate."

"I tried to see our consul, but he was on board some ship in the harbor," I explained. "If we could only communicate with him, he might do something."

"Oh, the consul at Santa Rosa can't do anything. He never did. O'Donnell might. But I reckon he's got about all he can do to stay here and keep out of prison. He never comes into Santa Rosa."

They brought us our breakfast. I will not attempt to tell what it was, because I don't know. It was a nauseating mess, anyway, but we knew we must eat.

"If we don't eat, and an opportunity to escape should offer, we wouldn't be able to take it," I said.

"Opportunity to escape!" Balover echoed. "Who ever heard of escaping from one of these burial holes?"

"But that messenger you sent with your letter escaped."

"True. But he was a minor prisoner, and wasn't down here. He had the run of the prison-court, and had people outside to help him."

"Can't we bribe somebody there to pass letters for us?" I asked.

"We can try it."

We watched the little iron grating Balover had mentioned in his letter. For hours no one came near it. Then two men were walking past, and stopped right over the grating to continue their conversation.

"They've got the two Americans," said one. "Both in the underground dungeon. I heard the captain say they were to be shot. I don't know when."

I had not been searched when I entered. They do not always attend to those things in a South American prison at night. My revolver had been taken from me, but I still had some money. I poked a piece of gold through the grating.

"*Señors*," I called softly.

"Who spoke?" asked one of the two. "Did you not hear a voice?"

"I did. Some one said '*señors*.' Ah! The American. Down here—see?"

I saw both their faces as they peered down at me.

"Will you carry a letter for us?" I asked. "We will pay you well."

"It is impossible," said the one who had spoken before. "I would not attempt it. Everybody is watched. The order has gone forth that you are to be shot. Any person caught with a letter from you would also be shot. Farewell, *señors*."

With that, the two walked off.

CHAPTER XIX.

DYNAMITE.

My heart sank. It is no pleasant thing to realize that you are to die within a short time. I suppose a person after

months or years of suffering welcomes such knowledge as the forerunner of a blessed relief.

But two young men, with everything to live for, could hardly be expected to look upon the prospect with equanimity.

Yet never in all the time that has passed since then, during which I have practised my profession, have I seen any one face death with the cool, almost insolent courage of Jim Balover.

"I hope, as long as they are going to shoot us, they will shoot us together," he remarked. "Even in death I suppose a fellow likes company."

"I can't see that it makes any difference," I rejoined. "It will be over in a minute. These fellows don't leave any blanks, as they do in time of war in our army when they shoot a man. Everybody shoots to kill. One little order, and it's all over."

"It wouldn't be so bad," he went on, "if it wasn't for the two girls. I suppose, of course, Isobel is safe—somewhere—but it's tough going and leaving her when I know she loves me."

"It is. I feel the same way."

"You? Are you in love? Is it Kate?"

"Yes," I answered, with a sigh. "It is Kate, and she seems to love me. I came after reading your letter, and we bade each other a fond good-bye. On her part it was almost a farewell, because she feared some disaster. But I was going to do wonders. Kick up a shindy with the consul, give old Don Manuel back his money and win his friendship, and have you out of here in no time. What have I done? Lost Don Manuel's money, got myself cut up into beefsteaks, and here I am now waiting to be shot like a mad dog. Kate was right. I've done nothing but mess everything since I tried to take Isobel to you."

"Oh, don't blame yourself for that. It was my fault. In the first place, I had no business to ask you to help me. And I should have told you about Kate."

"I'm glad you didn't. I am sorry you have not seen Isobel, but the kiss Kate gave me when I came away is worth a great deal."

"It isn't worth getting shot for."

"Well—there is no use arguing about that. If we could only—"

"Well, we can't. I've tried every-

thing. I've threatened them with men-of-war. I've tried to bribe them with all the money my uncle is worth. I've promised them good positions in the States. I've done everything. The trouble is, we are too prominent. If we were obscure, no-account devils, we might get out. As it is—*bang!*"

Cheerful talk in a damp, dark cell. But our spirits were not quite as lively as our talk. Our minds were keyed up to the breaking-point, and if, in the attempt to appear calm, we slopped over sometimes, it could hardly be called unnatural.

That day passed wearily. Evidently they were in no hurry to finish their job. There was no gloating over us, no abusive language. No one came near us at all except to bring what they called food.

We slept but little that night.

"Fraser," said Balover as we lay side by side on the straw, "I've got a peculiar feeling that you are going to get out of this and I am not. I don't know what makes me feel that way. But I do. And I want you to promise me something."

"I'll promise anything," I told him. "It is easy to promise when you know you can't fulfil. I fail to see any reason for such an idea as you have. If you are shot, of course I'll be."

"Well, I don't know. I hope I'm right. Anyway, if you do escape by any miracle, hunt till you find Isobel. Tell her that her name was the last word on my lips. And assure her of my love."

"I'll do that—but if I have a chance to do it, you will yourself."

We spent the night mostly in talking in this way, and were worn out when morning came.

While we were eating our breakfast a cloud came over the grating and a piece of paper dropped to the floor.

"Ah, a friend has found us out!" exclaimed Balover.

He sprang forward and picked up the paper.

As he opened it I saw in the dim light that his face turned paler.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Not a message from a friend," he replied.

I took the paper. It was printed in Spanish, and was a general order, to be scattered or posted in various places.

The purport of it was that the two notorious Americans—and our crimes were all mentioned and magnified—had been captured, and would be shot in the prison-yard at two o'clock in the morning.

There was a choking and stifled feeling in my throat. It had not been so difficult to be calm when there was hope of escape. But with this hope gone, with the notice of our execution in my hands, all my calmness seemed to leave me.

"Poor Kate! Poor Kate!" I murmured. "How I would like to see you once more before I die! I doubt now, Balover, if it was right for me to let her know I loved her."

"Well, you couldn't help it, could you? How can you hide love? I'm sorry that Isobel loves me now. Yet—I don't know. It's something of a comfort."

Small comfort it was to me to know that the girl whose love I had won, and from whom I had had only that farewell kiss, was to be left grieving in the wilds of South America. I knew she was safe now with O'Donnell, but my thoughts were far from cheerful.

That day was the most miserable I ever experienced. Every hour that brought us nearer the terrible ending of our lives made us more depressed.

At last we gave up trying to carry on any conversation, and just paced back and forth in the dungeon, glancing down at the floor as we passed each other, neither daring to look each other in the face lest both should break down and give way to our pent-up feelings.

At noon we received our dinner. It was better than the meals we had been given before, and we ate it, I don't know why; but all men condemned to death do eat heartily.

And at supper-time we had another good meal. Then darkness fell.

It was now merely a question of a few hours. If we had had any hope that the consul would act in our behalf, that hope vanished with the daylight. We knew no official work would be done after nightfall.

Oh, what a dreary, horrible waiting! Waiting for the summons to follow a guide to the *patio*, and there stand up to be shot dead!

We heard the great bell in the Santa Rosa cathedral chime the hour of midnight.

"Two hours more!" I heard Balover mutter. "Only two hours more to live."

Those two hours were dismal and long, but at last they were over.

We heard a drum. The ground in which our cell was dug seemed to tremble with the tramp of feet.

"It is time," said Balover. "A few minutes and all will be—"

Suddenly there was a terrific explosion. Detonation after detonation split the air. The ground seemed to heave upward. Gaping holes were made in the top of our cell as the earth and stone and adobe came crashing through.

"The ships have bombarded the town!" cried Balover, grasping my arm.

It did not seem like a bombardment to me. The explosions seemed to be in the prison itself.

"Whatever it is," I said, "here's a hole big enough to crawl through. Come on. It can't be any worse even if we are caught."

We wriggled ourselves up through a hole, and found ourselves in the long hall of the prison. Men were rushing about with lanterns, shouting, cursing, and trying to find out what was the matter.

We were not noticed. Nobody paid any attention to us. Everybody was scared out of his wits.

We reached the road.

"Run," I said to Balover—"run for your life. Let's get back to O'Donnell's camp."

We started. Beyond the prison there was a dark clump of woods. As we ran along the road, from these woods a figure darted toward us.

"Bob! Jim! Wait, we've got horses."

Great Heaven, it was Kate Arnold! And then from the trees, leading two horses, came Mary O'Donnell.

"We didn't dare bring any more. We can ride these two and hurry," said Kate.

We wasted no time, but Balover took Mary and I took Kate, and we bounded away.

"I don't understand how you happened to be there when the explosion took place," I said to Kate when we had gone far enough to slacken our pace a little.

"We *were* the explosion," replied Kate. "Didn't you know what that was? Well, that was dynamite. Mary knew where her father kept it. He had to go up in the hills last evening, and a passing hunter gave us the notice of your execution. Mary and I were frantic for a time, and I happened to say I'd like to blow up the old prison. Mary said 'Let's.' Well, to make a short story of it, we took the dynamite and shattered the jail. Thank God, we didn't hurt you. But you were going to be shot, anyway. We took the chance of either getting you out or killing you."

Here was a girl! I hugged her as we hurried to the mining camp.

There was, of course, a sensation. But with horses loaned us by O'Donnell, and a guide who knew a roundabout way to the border, we started on a long journey to Argentina.

We reached the Plate River, and found a boatman who would take us to Buenos Ayres.

At Buenos Ayres we rested, and on the morning following our arrival Kate and I talked over our affairs.

"I've got money enough," I said, "and a profession. You are practically mistress of your own affairs. Why wait? Let us go to the United States embassy and be married."

She agreed.

We were courteously received at the embassy.

"I think we know all about you," said a high official. "We have even now as a guest a young lady from Santa Rosa. She has interested the ambassador in the matter, but we feared it would be too late. Anyway, you are in safe hands now."

"Who is the young lady?" I asked in surprise.

"Why—Señorita Isobel Fernandez, the daughter of the old *don*. She ran away from home, rather than go to Spain, and sought refuge here. Learning that she was engaged to marry an American, of course we gave her our most hearty protection."

In ten minutes Isobel was in Balover's arms, and there were two weddings instead of one.

You can imagine the rest—the long explanations, the laughter, and the tears; though there was little to cry about, except joy.

We sailed for New York, where we still are, a little older, but just as happy, and Balover and I are both prosperous.

We often argue. I insist that I did not give him any assistance when he asked it, and he insists that I did. I leave you to judge.

THE END.

A MILLIONAIRE'S DILEMMA.

By M. GERTRUDE MILLER.

How a wealthy Californian came to run amuck
in a New York hotel noted for its quiet elegance.

WHEN Sam Johnson registered at Denver or Chicago hotels, everybody got busy, and the best room in the house was at his disposal. For he it known that from Chicago to the Coast, Sam Johnson was popularly known as the "Mining King."

It was, therefore, from force of habit that, upon reaching New York late one Saturday afternoon, in the teeth of a northwest blizzard, he looked about him as he alighted from the cab to see how many of the "boys," as he termed re-

porters, might be waiting for him. The capitalist whom he had come East to meet, in connection with a railroad deal, had, however, designated a quiet hotel, in order to keep the matter out of the papers, and Johnson's arrival attracted no attention.

The clerk appeared no more concerned by the bold signature, "Sam Johnson, California," than if he had signed "John Doe, New York"; and, indeed, beyond a certain freedom of movement gained in the open, there was

little in Johnson's personal appearance to indicate the magnate.

Upon learning his name, the clerk handed him a telegram which had just come. With the aid of his code-key, Johnson grasped the fact that the storm had delayed this wire, which stated that the gentleman he had come to see had concluded to meet him in Chicago, instead of New York. Johnson gave utterance to an exclamation of annoyance, then philosophically decided that, now he was here, he might as well take in the allurements of the "Great White Way." With this end in view, immediately upon reaching his room he examined the contents of his pocket-book.

"By George, I must have blown a roll!" he said to himself when he found just a dollar in loose change.

He, however, took out his check-book with the easy assurance of a man on good terms with his bankers, mentally calculating that five hundred would do "as a starter." He accordingly signed the check with that peculiar series of little kinks and flourishes affected by moneyed men.

"I didn't bring much cash with me," he said pleasantly, as he handed the check, a few moments later, to the clerk.

That individual puckered his brow, and, after a whispered consultation with the manager, promptly returned it.

"We don't cash out-of-town checks for strangers," he said shortly.

Johnson's cheerful smile vanished.

"Do you know who I am?" he thundered.

The clerk smiled superciliously.

"I don't care a rap who you are," he remarked indifferently. "Rules are rules."

"May I ask if you are in the habit of insulting your guests?"

A certain glint in the Californian's eye, unpleasantly suggestive of firearms, warned the clerk, and he spoke in a conciliatory tone:

"If you can find anybody to identify you, we might accommodate you."

As Johnson sauntered over toward the telephone-booth, which was presided over by a haughty young woman attired in a princesse gown, his thoughts were working overtime. By a strange freak

of fate, he had no New York acquaintances outside of the millionaire class.

The girl at the switchboard opened her eyes when Johnson asked her to call up Henry Abbott. *She* knew the Abbotts had sailed for Europe that morning, for the "Society" column was daily perused by her; but experience had warned her not to make suggestions.

"The Riviera for the winter," was the curt information at the other end of the wire.

"Ah—too bad—I had hoped to see the old man while I was here. Try William Thayer."

Thayer's was a name to conjure with in the East; but he had seemed a small man when Sam Johnson "put him up" at the leading Frisco club and entertained him at his ranch.

"Egypt—been gone a month," was the laconic answer of the caretaker at the Thayer residence.

Seven other gentlemen of equal social and financial eminence were suggested, but with equally futile results. Some were on the Atlantic, one yachting in the Caribbean—all were unavailable for purposes of identification.

When Sam Johnson had paid for these calls he found himself down to ten cents, and, for the moment, at a loss what to do next. So absorbed was he in his own thoughts that he failed to observe the curious glance bestowed upon him by the priestess of the switchboard.

A sudden idea came to him as he strolled across the lobby: why not try to dispose of his return ticket to San Francisco. He decided to breast the gale and make the attempt.

It would have been an "eye-opener," to say the least, could he have heard the conversation at the desk as the revolving door swung to behind him.

"Say, whatever you got hold of now?" asked the telephone girl. "Is he an anarchist, or just crazy? Why, he's called up nine of the richest men in New York—said he knew them intimately—and the papers have all told they were out of town."

The clerk glanced up, interested. "I don't like his looks, either," he remarked; "but we'll gamble on him till Monday morning, and then it'll either be cash up or get out."

As Sam Johnson crossed over into the avenue, he had considerable trouble in keeping his feet against the rapidly increasing storm. The street lamps shone dimly through the snow. For the first time in twenty years he was without money in a big city.

He smiled rather grimly at the irony of Fate—a penniless millionaire. What a newspaper story it would make! But meantime, he *must* get some cash. A railroad ticket-office informed him it would take some time, perhaps a week, to arrange about the ticket, and Johnson turned angrily on his heel.

Contrary to the usual run of self-made men, Johnson was without ostentation in his dress, and wore no jewelry, except a pearl scarf-pin and a watch. The former was a present from his wife. For a moment the handsome interior of his dining-room at home flashed before his mind, and a vision of the one woman in the world, lonely in all her luxury because he was not there. No, he could not pawn the scarf-pin.

The watch was a gift from some fellow miners on the day they all struck luck together. He remembered how awkwardly they had made the presentation, yet how sincere a tribute of affection it was. He would starve rather than part with that memento of the past.

A hotel on the corner gave him a new inspiration.

"By Jove! I'll wire Bill Adams 'collect' for funds," he thought.

Bill had been the spokesman of the watch donors. Sam Johnson laughed to himself as he thought of that gentleman now, the meek husband of one of Chicago's social meteors.

"Sorry, sir," said the Western Union operator, "but there's another blizzard starting in on the track of this one, and the wires are down. You can leave the message, if you like, and take your chances. We *may* be able to reach Chicago by Monday."

"And I have the reputation of being a lucky fellow," Johnson reflected bitterly as he turned away from the telegraph-office.

The lobby was filled with well-dressed people bound to theater and opera, and he mingled with them, hoping to find among that throng some familiar face.

But not one person had he ever seen before.

As he stood on the steps watching the last motor whirl away, Johnson realized how a fellow down and out on his luck must feel, looking on at a prosperous, pleasure-seeking crowd with whom he has nothing in common.

"Why, my check for a hundred thousand would be honored anywhere from Chicago to Frisco," he reflected, "and here I am in New York, as destitute as a hobo."

With a sigh for the play he must forego, Sam Johnson hurried back to his hotel, suddenly recollecting he had not dined.

"I'm good for at least five square meals anyhow, between now and Monday morning," he told himself.

The food might have been execrable, or it might have been ambrosia, for all he knew, however, since he barely tasted it. With a reckless air, Johnson tossed his last dime to the waiter and left the dining-room.

Once in his own apartment again, he laughed to himself over the ridiculous predicament.

To work off his irritation, he paced restlessly back and forth. As he did so, the main heads of a speech on the "Expansion of the West," which he was due to deliver a week hence at the Chicago Chamber of Commerce dinner, came into his mind. In imagination, he saw before him the sleek, prosperous members of that dignified body. As the subject possessed him, his voice grew louder and louder.

"Say, No. 520's crazy!" exclaimed a small bell-boy, running excitedly up to the desk. "He's yellin' and talkin' to himself up there to beat the band!"

A sudden light dawned upon the clerk.

"I thought that fellow was off his bat," he said, turning to the manager.

"Well, if he is," suggested the latter—a small, excitable man—"you'd better call up Belford right away. We can't take any chances. Remember what a time we had with that crazy Dutchman last year—claimed he was an attaché of the German embassy, and turned out to be an anarchist on his way to Washington to kill the President."

The clerk picked up the telephone.

"Belford Hospital," he said quickly.

"Dr. Belknap, of the psychopathic ward—in a hurry. Oh, I say, is that you, doctor? This is the Grantley. We've got a fellow here who imagines he's a California millionaire, but it's my private belief he hasn't a cent."

The voice at the other end answered calmly: "We can't do anything unless he grows violent—you've got to be careful in such cases. If you have any trouble with him, however, call upon us."

"You keep watch of 520, Jimmy," cautioned the clerk, returning to his desk. "If he goes off his head, run right down here."

The small bell-boy had been all ears during this conversation, and his face betokened intense interest. With an appreciative grin, he was off like a shot.

The telephone girl stepped up to the desk.

"No. 520's just tried to have me get Senator Bradley, of California, at his Washington home," she said excitedly, "and they told me he was at the White House. No. 520 says to get him, anyhow, even if I have to call the President in order to do it. Do you s'pose he's *another*?" she added in an undertone.

The manager walked back to the booth with her. "Instead of the White House, he'll get *me* on the wire," he announced decidedly.

"Yes, sir," as an excited voice sounded from the upper regions, "I'll get the White House right away—and when I do, I'll call you."

Meantime, Johnson's restlessness had increased to fever heat. A half-hour elapsed, and he was not yet connected with Senator Bradley. He rang frantically for bell-boys—no response!

"Never mind that Washington call," he said finally, taking up the receiver. "I'll try again in the morning."

Sunday morning, early, the occupant of Room 520 began to ring. Word had, however, gone forth among the bell-boys that he was crazy, and they feared to answer the call—especially since the dining-room had reported him as a "ten-center," and there was, consequently, no glittering bait to stimulate their courage. But, overpowered by curi-

osity, they had crept up noiselessly from time to time to reconnoiter. It was on one of these occasions that Johnson flung the door open suddenly and found Jimmy crouched at the keyhole.

The Californian had spent a sleepless night, and his temper was completely beyond control. Jimmy screamed lustily as Johnson grabbed him.

II.

A HALF-HOUR later, two gentlemen who had just been telephoning were astonished to behold a frantic, wild-eyed, disheveled person dragged through the corridor, loudly protesting. His collar was torn, blood streamed from a cut in his forehead, and two Belford attendants who had him in charge seemed to meet with no check from the management.

"What's all this about?" asked one of the onlookers, turning to the telephone girl.

"Oh, just a lunatic who imagines he's a millionaire from California. He's been calling up the biggest men in New York—tried to get a big check cashed last night, but they were on to him right away; so the minute he got violent, they phoned the insane ward at Belford. They're taking him off now," and the girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

The gentleman addressed suddenly caught sight of the victim's face.

"By all that's holy, if that isn't Sam Johnson!" he exclaimed.

"What's left of him, Duncan," Johnson called out faintly.

Mr. Duncan turned angrily to the manager.

"What in the name of common sense do you mean?" he demanded. "Why, this gentleman is known from one end of the West to the other. If he's out of funds, he can draw on me for any sum he wants."

"And on me, too," echoed his companion.

The doctors from Belford beat a hasty retreat as they grasped the situation. The manager and clerk stood aghast, too thoroughly overcome to attempt a defense.

"Mr. Johnson," said the former, finally pulling himself together, "the

house is at your disposal. Only tell us what we can do to square things—"

Before Johnson could answer, the loud "*Choo! Choo!*" of an automobile sounded at the door, and a pompous individual, fur-coated and capped, fairly burst through the revolving-door.

"How fortunate I am to get here in time," the newcomer exclaimed, rushing up to the Californian and extending his hand. "I hurried on here at once, when the Auditorium told me you had just left. But, what on earth—"

His eye suddenly lighted on Johnson's disreputable appearance.

The clerk and manager exchanged significant glances. Clearly their case

was hopeless *now!* For when this gentleman, who always selected the Grantley for his private "deals," and had left a golden train of gratuities in his wake—when he once learned how his friend had been maltreated, they would see him no more at that hostelry, nor his benefactions.

Sam Johnson may have caught the appeal in their eyes, or it may have been his irrepressible sense of humor—for he laughingly replied: "Oh, nothing, Mr. Piermont, I've just been 'seeing New York,' that's all. I thought we moved some out our way; but I must confess, for speed and excitement, we aren't in it with Gotham!"

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.

By ROBERT CARLTON BROWN.

The confessions of a bluffer in connection with an episode in which he himself was perfectly on the level.

IF anybody had come along at that moment and offered me twenty real dollars for my chances of heaven, and I've always considered them pretty good, I'd have taken the money without a moment's hesitation.

You don't hesitate when you're busted, you know; there's no use. If opportunity had knocked on my door, she'd have never got away with it. I'd have opened up so quick and pulled her in and put her in the refrigerator for safe keeping that there'd never have been a chance for her to get out and do any more knocking.

But nothing turned up. I'd hocked everything I had, except my socks, and I only had a clean pair of them left. I'd called on every friend I knew and used every persuasive argument I could think of. But all to no avail.

Here I was, fifteen cents in loose change in my pocket and three well-worn dollars in my wallet.

There wasn't any use of praying; I'd got past that. So I sat there in my elegant suite, consisting of a hall bedroom, and absently fingered over the three dollars.

I pulled out a pack of cards to pass

the time and fell to pretending that I was a gambler; not that I have ever been anything else, although a mighty poor one. Well, I'd take a card off the top and put my fifteen cents on it to hold it down. Then I'd look in the glass at my face, beautifully bedecked with whiskers, and meander on this wise:

"Bill, I'll bet you it's a red card."

"What'll you bet?" I'd answer myself.

"Three dollars," was my quick comeback, and then I'd flash the anemic roll and lay it on top of the card.

After that I'd turn the card up and find that it was black.

You see, luck was against me. I couldn't win even mind-money; and as for paying those friendly little bets, I'd just chalk them up on the bureau and offer to double that the next one would be a heart.

Sure enough, when I turned the card it would be a spade. You couldn't beat it. I could have gambled on my luck without fear, but there's no use gambling that way.

And the worst of it all was I was in wrong on the love-game, too. When

you get in wrong that way there are only two things left to do: go out and drown your sorrow or yourself.

You see, this girl wasn't any common article. She was ace high, but she made me feel like a deuce-spot when I looked at her.

I'd been telling her right along we'd get hitched up, and she'd been calling on me to produce the goods in the shape of an engagement-ring. Well, what could I do?

It was a cinch I couldn't tell her how busted I was, for there's nothing will kill love quicker; and I couldn't give any plausible excuse about the ring, except that I hadn't found a stone good enough for her.

After that gag wore out, I told her I'd got the ring and I was having it engraved. The jeweler had been working on it about a week now, and I was beginning to think he'd never get through. So was she.

Well, I kept on playing cards, until I stood about three hundred out against myself; and then I was struck with a brilliant idea.

No, I wasn't going out to make a name for myself and win her. I hadn't any game to work or anything of that sort. The idea was quite common and sordid, and not at all in the class with most of them.

It was only that I remembered a friend, an old "bar-keep," who was the only one on my calling-list that I hadn't touched.

Of course, I couldn't slight him; so I jumped up, having just lost another hundred to myself, and, leaving the cards as they lay, I took down my two-dollar Panama and made a noise like going away.

The noise was very effective. My landlady rushed out with an open hand. I knew she couldn't hurt me much without doubling it up, so I walked right past her and didn't bat an eye.

When I struck the street I was undecided. It might be well to end it all by falling through a handy man-hole. For a minute I wished that some passing air-ship would drop a bag of ballast and obliterate me. But then courage came, and I decided to take my fate in my own hands.

Understand me right, I didn't intend to commit suicide or matrimony. I wasn't that desperate. I just thought that a nice little lonesome walk down on the dock would fall in well with my present mood, so I lit out for the Battery.

I went down on one of the steamer piers and stood around in the way, half hoping that somebody would come along and push me off. But nobody did, and so I kept on walking around.

All of a sudden I looked down.

Then I looked up.

After that I looked around, pretending that I was searching for the Lusitania, or some other mere speck on the horizon, but in reality I was trying to see if anybody was watching me.

Nobody was. So, with one quick lunge, I shot out my arm and picked it up.

Then I held it up to the light and admired it.

The stone was as pretty a one-carat diamond as I ever saw in my life.

The gem was set in a ring. I slipped the thing on my little finger and flashed it in the sun. My chest got in between the sun and the ring, and I could hardly see it for being so puffed up.

Well, I didn't waste much more time on that pier. I didn't like the scenery, anyway. What was the use of looking for the owner, I argued. Of course, the person who had lost it had sailed to Africa that morning, and foreign advertising would be so expensive.

Yes, I decided to keep it and not say a word to the coroner or any other of the city officials.

I jumped on a car, and felt languidly in my pocket for some loose change, as though it weren't worth the mentioning. I found it, all right. Fifteen cents was all. I looked at it with surprise, just as though I thought I had any more, except the three ones, which immediately became small change in my eyes, dazzled as they were by the diamond.

It's the surest thing you know that I got off at Mabel's street. Some way or other, I couldn't think of anything else.

Didn't I have the engagement-ring now, and couldn't we hock it and get married? My luck had changed.

Mabel came to the door; I went in.

When we sat down I flashed it on her.

"Oh, Bill!" she said.

I took the bouquet and bowed for the applause. It was all very nice. I couldn't have expected anything better if I'd paid twice the price for the engagement-ring.

"But, Bill," she broke out suddenly, slipping the ring over her thumb, "it doesn't fit!"

"Confound that jeweler, anyway!" I exclaimed, grabbing the ring away from her. "What right's he got insulting my bride-to-be by making the thing so large? Still, he probably made the ring after the regular pattern, and didn't figure on your fingers being so much smaller than the rest of them."

She fell for it—women always do—and she handed me a sweet smile when I told her I'd have it fixed up for her right away.

I slipped the ring on my little finger, and we both sat there admiring it, like two children looking at an all-day sucker.

Well, finally her happiness began running away with her, and she suggested something about going out and getting a little lunch to celebrate the occasion. I hung back for a minute; she gave me a queer look, and suggested that the ring must have busted me.

"Not on your life," I came back at her. "A little thing like that! Why, girl, I was thinking of buying you a pair of those stones, but I couldn't find another as good as this one to match. Put on your duds and we'll go right out."

"But I'm not eating much myself to-day," I added, as I remembered the fact that three little bones was all that there was between me and being dead broke.

I was just chuckling to myself about the whole thing, and dreaming over what I was going to do to the bookies next day after I hocked that sparkler, when she came back all dressed up, like she was going to the races.

Well, I managed to side-step a few of the swellest joints on the Great White Way, and finally hauled up at a pretty good place where I figured she could fill her face for about two-fifty; and I counted on myself for one little highball, just for company, although I

had breakfasted that morning on three cigarettes and the last drop in my flask.

She didn't order very strong, and I was feeling mighty happy.

Joe de Free came in, and I called him over. He caught sight of the ring and tried hard not to notice it. I saw him turn green, however. He used to be in love with Mabel.

Well, he didn't say much; he never liked me, anyway. But he looked holes in that ring, and then smiled and took the table farthest away from us. I knew it made the right sort of a killing, because Joe knew diamonds; and he stuck up his nose at this one, which clearly showed that it was a pretty good sparkler.

I was tickled at the way he took my sudden rise in the world, and so was Mabel; she never liked him, anyway, after the first time she saw me.

You see, she knew he'd be watching us, and she wanted to show him she had a man with a roll; so she changed her mind, called back the waiter, and lit into that menu as though she was coming down the home-stretch.

The pace was a little too fast for me. It went over my pile the third time she opened her mouth. But I figured I could call the head waiter aside and tell him to hold off the balance until I could send my check over. I've done that before.

Having the three in my pocket to show that I was right gave me confidence, and I knew I could get out of it some way by paying that part in cash. It showed I had the right spirit, anyway.

The only thing that worried me was that Joe would see me do it, and I couldn't stand for that. But I figured I could excuse myself and see the head waiter before the bill came, and have it fixed without Joe de Free getting wise.

Of course, I couldn't say anything to the girl. I peeked around the edge of the table to see if she had her hand-bag with her; but, no, nothing doing—she was out to lunch on my invitation.

Well, I sat there and quailed in spirit while she ate it on toast. I didn't get blue around the gills; in fact, I never have since I learned to bluff at poker.

The game got kind of interesting, and I watched her eat as though I enjoyed it. She urged me to take something; and Joe was looking, so I took a little lobster salad just to keep her company.

It was all I could do to keep from picking up the dish and letting it all down my mouth at once. I was that hungry.

Well, you know, all good things come to an end, and mine came with a sudden shock.

The waiter tiptoed around to my side and whispered in my ear:

"It's Saturday afternoon, and I wait out in Fort George in a hotel over Sunday; would you please pay your bill now, so I can get away?"

Well, there was nothing to do but pay, and very little to pay with.

With my best thousand-dollar air, I reached into my pocket and said: "Certainly, *garçon*."

Of course, he thought I was the real goods. I even deceived myself for a minute.

But only a minute.

I felt again.

My wallet was not there.

Then I searched in my other pockets. Nothing doing. Meanwhile, the waiter was waiting, which, being his business, didn't worry me much; but I caught sight of Joe looking at me out of the tail of his eye, and Mabel was toying with her fork and looking kind of fussed.

Then I remembered suddenly that I had left the three bills at home on the cards, when the sudden inspiration came to go out and look up that old bar-keep friend.

I told the waiter about it, and he smiled, as though he had heard the story before. Maybe he had, for it's one of my best.

I didn't know what to do, so I didn't do anything.

Then it occurred to me to call the head waiter.

He came and looked me over. It was a careful scrutiny. I felt as though I were taking a civil-service examination in bluffing, and was about to have my examination-paper marked sixteen, on the basis of one hundred points.

I told him my story, too. I'd have

told it to the priest. The only weak point in it was that I knew what the wallet contained, and they didn't.

"I've had too much of this around here," he told me at length, looking me over carefully. "I don't cater to the trade of the sporting fraternity, anyway, and I think the best thing you can do is to wait peacefully until I call up the patrol."

I thought wildly of Joe. Then I decided in a hurry that I'd rather go to the station than borrow money of him.

Suddenly I caught sight of my ring.

I had forgotten all about that.

Pulling the diamond off, I assumed my most haughty manner and remarked: "Possibly you will be willing to keep this as a deposit until I return with the cash for this trifling lunch?"

It killed him. I could hear his last breath as he passed away.

Taking the ring, he started a series of bowings and pardonings. I began to think I was king of the South Sea Islands and that I was hiring him just to do that.

I got so forgiving and generous all of a sudden that I had a mind to give the waiter half my kingdom as a tip.

But just then the throne fell.

Possibly you never heard a throne fall. I never did before. They make an uproarious crash.

You see, this was how it was:

Joe de Free had heard part of the argument and noticed me offering the diamond as security. I had seen him making for the table on a gallop, but I figured he only wanted to lend me money.

What was my surprise when he butted in and grabbed the ring, at the same time yelling:

"It's a phony diamond. It ain't worth fifteen cents. They make 'em over in Connecticut and sell 'em by the barrel; they buy 'em down on the Bowery by the bushel, and you can get 'em anywhere by the peck."

That finished me. I waited patiently for somebody to come along and carry out the remains on a stretcher. I knew it would be me. Who else could it be?

My head hit what used to be my chest, and I gave one groan as I looked at Mabel.

Joe was standing beside her with that blooming leer of his, and of course she thought I did it all on purpose. It hurt her pretty hard, I guess, and I hated to see Joe standin' so close to her. But what could I do?

The head waiter cremated what was left of me with a fiery stare and started in the direction of the telephone, which I knew to be an instrument used on occasions to call the police.

Just as he left the tableau around the table, in which I was playing villain and Joe hero, an old fellow I had noticed at the table next to us bounced up and butted in.

"Wait a minute!" he hollered, grabbing the head waiter by the sleeves and pulling him back.

"Let me see that diamond!" he went on.

The head waiter handed it over dumbly, and I saw the old man's eyes light up.

I didn't hope. What was the use? He was probably a detective, anyway. Oh, but I was in wrong!

"You gentlemen are mistaken; that *is* a diamond, but it is full of flaws and yellow," he continued, after a careful scrutiny of the stone.

Joe's jaw fell. He hadn't had a good look at the thing, anyway.

The head waiter looked at the venerable gentleman and began to back water.

"I'll give you thirty dollars for it right now," the old gentleman offered at length.

"It belongs to him," said the waiter, drawing toward me.

"Will you take thirty for it?" the old gentleman asked kindly, stepping over to me.

"Will I—will I—will I take—say that again, please," I stammered.

"I've offered you thirty," he repeated; "will you take it?"

For some minutes I tried to get the nerve to reply; then I held my hand out limply and answered: "Lay it there."

Pulling out the healthiest pocketbook I have seen in years, the old gentleman peeled a hundred-dollar bill from the outside and handed it to the waiter.

"Get that changed," he ordered.

Joe disappeared.

The head waiter lifted me back to my rightful throne as king of the South Sea Islands, and I dismissed him with a wave of my hand when I began to feel that his salaaming act was getting pretty poor.

The waiter rushed back, his hand trembling with its load of bills.

Skinning off fives to the number of six, the elderly gentleman handed me the thirty with a smile and slipped the ring in his pocket.

I paid my bill and cut for the door, Mabel hanging weakly to my arm.

Just as I got out I saw the old man coming through the door.

I turned to thank him as he got into a taxicab.

"Don't thank me," he said; "even if it was a poor diamond, I wanted it."

"But for when and for why?" I murmured weakly. "You don't mean that it *isn't* a diamond, after all?"

"It's the rottenest fake I ever saw," he told me, "and you played a pretty poor game yourself."

"Me! Played a game?" I cried, trying hard to understand.

"Sure. You knew it was a phony diamond all the time," he smiled.

"I did not. But if it's a fake, why—why on earth did you pay me thirty for it then?" I cried.

"Bo," and he pulled my ear closer, "bo, that hundred-dollar bill I changed was a phony, too. I've been trying to get rid of it all day. I saw the chance there and took it. I'm much obliged to you."

Giving the driver an order, he spun off.

I stood dazed on the curb, staring after him, until Mabel grabbed me and led me off as meek as a lamb.

"Have you got the price of a marriage license?" she asked.

I pulled out the remainder of the thirty and answered: "Why?"

"Because," she replied, "we're going to get one. You need somebody to look after you."

I was convinced that she was right; and, as I had the price and felt a change in my luck, I called up a taxi and we started off.

Just as we were turning the corner Mabel looked back.

Suddenly she grabbed my arm.

"What's that man dancing up and down on the sidewalk for?" was her question.

I took a look.

The man she was talking about was the proprietor of the restaurant, and he was jumping around wildly in front of his place.

"That doesn't seem to be a look of joy on his face, does it?" I smiled.

"But what's the matter with him?"

"Stung, I guess."

It wasn't until later that I really realized who had got the worst of the deal that made me a happy man for life and put the crook just seventy dollars ahead. Then I realized why the restaurant-keeper was dancing around.

About a week after that my wife and I hit a bunch of luck, and consequently fed our faces at the Waldorf.

Just as we were being seated I saw a little group around a near-by corner.

To my boundless surprise, I made out the face of the man who had given me thirty for the phony diamond, and thus

stuck the restaurant-keeper for a hundred.

My blood boiled. He had accused me of trying to work a game when I was absolutely on the square. The fellow he had stung ought to get his money back.

I stepped over to the table, after whispering to my wife to wait a moment and watch what happened.

When I confronted him he turned deathly pale. I felt sorry for him for a second—but no longer.

Then I found that he had just befriended somebody or other, as he had me, and had sent a fifty out to be changed.

I hurried after the waiter and asked to see the bill.

Sure enough, it was a phony.

Then I bawled him out.

Well, I paid back to the restaurant-keeper the thirty that had put me on my feet, so that left only seventy for the counterfeiter to return. And when he got our two rolls together you never saw such a happy hash-house proprietor in your life.

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

Three thousand miles from home, hope gone, and the realization that you are being hounded by a man who has done you a service and is eager to make a touch.

"O H, good morning, Walker!"

Myers wheeled around in his chair and faced the young playwright, who stood at a respectful distance from the theatrical manager's desk.

"I'm glad you came in," he continued, "because I wanted to see you regarding this play of yours. Just draw that chair up here."

Walker did so, and a nervous expectancy came over him. Was his work really going to be accepted?

"I've read your play," Myers continued. "That is, I've read it over hurriedly; and I'm frank in saying I like it. Of course, there are some little defects—or, at least, they appear defects to me—but they are so unimportant that we could easily smooth them out. On

the whole, I think it is very good—very good, indeed."

Walker's breath was coming in short, quick gasps. Now, perhaps, he need not remember that he had only money enough to last until a set day, and that day rapidly approaching.

"Then you—take it?" he said slowly.

"Well, no; not exactly." Myers could not fail to notice Walker's countenance as it slowly paled to the color of chalk. "Neither do I say I will not take it," the manager hastened to add. "I want a little more time to give it a second reading."

"More time?" the younger man repeated bitterly. "That's what you all say, and then, in the end, it comes back to me."

"Well, of course I don't know what the others have said," the manager went on; "but, as for me, I am serious, and mean business. To-day is Monday; give me until Wednesday to decide, and I assure you I will give you a positive answer then. It will be yes or no."

"Very well, sir," Walker assented in tones of disappointment. He seemed completely discouraged. "I shall come back on Wednesday."

"Yes, in the afternoon," Myers added—"about three o'clock. Is that agreeable to you?"

"It is."

The rising of the manager to his feet told Walker more plainly than words that the interview was at an end, and, accepting the extended hand, he walked slowly toward the door, where he suddenly faced about.

"Do you think—do you think—you'll use it?" he queried falteringly.

"Come back Wednesday—three o'clock," was the manager's noncommittal reply, and the playwright hastily left the office.

Upon reaching the sidewalk, Walker stood for some moments, lost in thought. He did not heed the passing throng. At last he brought out his express company book, and counted carefully the remaining checks.

"Just enough to last me the week out," he mused as he replaced the book in his pocket. "If Myers does not take the play—well, it's the Annapolis for me on Saturday. In the meantime, to eat and sleep, I must count every penny before I spend it. Well, I've got to have some more money, so I might as well get it now."

He turned and walked slowly across the square, headed in the direction of the express company's offices.

Stanley Walker was distinctly American. Tall, broad-shouldered, and with an air of self-confidence that marks the self-made man, he was liked and respected by all with whom he came in contact.

As society reporter for one of the leading newspapers of New York, he had come in touch in a small way with the stage and its celebrities. Not as closely as might be thought, perhaps, but enough to instil into his heart the

ambition to write a successful play. The germ of this desire was not left very long in its original state, but grew rapidly as Walker built upon a plot that had struck his fancy; and, as the play neared completion, he began to dream of fame and riches.

Contrary to the usual experiences of young dramatists, Walker was successful in interesting a manager even before the play was finished, and a few months later he saw the beginning of his dream realized—the city was billed from one end to the other with posters announcing the new play.

Then fate dealt him a cruel blow. The play, while not being ranked with the season's failures, was certainly not a success; and after a two-weeks' run, was consigned to that graveyard which has proved a resting-place for the hopes and ambitions of so many playwrights.

But Walker was not discouraged; instead, he saw defects in the play he did not realize existed at the rehearsals.

With this as a stimulus to further effort, he resigned his position—he had about a thousand dollars saved up—and threw himself heart and soul into the work a new play demanded. In due time it was completed to his satisfaction, and he set out upon the task of finding a manager.

Here he met his Waterloo. The manager who had put on his first play would not even read the new one—he had lost heavily on the other—and Walker traveled from one theatrical office to the next; but the same reply met him on all sides—they were supplied with plays for at least two seasons.

At length, in absolute disgust with American theaters, he decided to invade a new field, and immediately began preparations for a trip to London. He gathered together all his available assets, converted them into express-orders, representing about three hundred dollars, and sailed for England.

Immediately upon his arrival he started on his rounds of the theatrical offices. But no manager greeted him with outstretched hand—the right reaching eagerly for the manuscript and the left tendering a good-sized check for advance royalties.

Failure stared the dramatist in the

face, and, although he fought against it, he began to realize his hopes were ebbing rapidly. But faster still, his funds were dwindling away.

Then came a sudden turn that brought him from the depths of despair to the heights of hope.

He ventured, one day, timorously into Mr. Augustus Myers's office again, after repeated efforts to see him. The manager had now returned to the city, he learned. Breathlessly he awaited the answer of the boy who had taken his card to the inner office.

He could hardly believe it true when that watch-dog came back and pompously pushed him into the sanctum sanctorum.

The interview was very brief—Mr. Myers said he would be glad to read the play if Walker would leave it for a few days; and after arranging for an interview for the following Monday, the young dramatist took his departure.

Monday came at last, and he again presented himself at Myers's office. His heart beat rapidly as he listened to the manager's words, and although there was nothing definite arranged, he felt now that the future did hold something in store for him.

But when he reached the sidewalk, and carefully counted the express checks, he ascertained that, for the present at least, it was not ready cash. He had just enough funds to last until Saturday, and leave sufficient to pay his passage home, and then it would have to be one of the slower steamship lines.

When he reached the express company's offices he took out the checks he wished converted into English currency, leaving in the book just enough to pay his passage.

"In gold, please," he said as he passed them through the window.

The clerk took the checks, examined the signatures carefully, then proceeded to count out the requested amount in sovereigns and some silver.

The money was pushed out to him just as Walker realized that another man had entered and stood behind him, awaiting his turn at the window. A quick glance disclosed a tall person in a gray suit.

The playwright pulled the pile of

coin toward him and, moving aside a trifle, proceeded to count it.

At that instant he heard the stranger query: "Has that remittance arrived yet?"

Walker was on the point of glancing up at the man whose voice he had instantly recognized as distinctly American. Then a thought struck him.

Here was a fellow countryman in a strange land, evidently in need of funds, who might recognize him as from the United States and, seeing him counting what looked like a large amount of money, request a temporary loan. If he did, what could he say, and how could—

"No; not yet, sir," the voice of the cashier broke in upon Walker's thoughts.

"Good Heavens, man! I've got to live, and I can't return to New York without funds. Are you positive my cable was sent?"

"Yes, sir; positive," the cashier assured him.

"Well, I'm in a pretty hole, I must say. If I only knew some one here in London—"

At that instant Walker dropped the gold coins into his pocket, and they clicked together noisily. Then he realized the stranger had stopped abruptly in his speech, and a peculiar intuition told him the American was staring at his back.

"What could I say or do if he should ask me to loan him some money?" flashed through Walker's mind. "I couldn't do it, and he wouldn't believe me, and—"

He felt a hand upon his arm, and knew his fears had been realized. On the impulse of the moment, he slipped from under the weight of the stranger's hand and, without a glance toward him, dashed from the office at full speed, and springing into a waiting hansom, ordered the driver to make all possible haste to his hotel.

II.

THE cab tore up the traffic-thronged street at a reckless pace, Walker not daring even to look behind, fearing he might be followed. A strange feeling had come over him at thought of the dire plight of his fellow countryman.

"Why, his case is even worse than mine," the dramatist reflected, settling back in the cushions. "I can get back to New York, while he—well, Heaven only knows what he'll do."

Then he added quickly: "Pshaw! He'll get his remittance any moment, and then he'll undoubtedly be a great deal better off than I am. From the side glance I caught, he looked pretty prosperous, anyway."

Certain now that he was not followed, he interested himself in the crowds through which he was being driven, and the incident was forgotten. But some moments later it returned forcibly.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed aloud. "The last time I was at the express office I left my address there, with orders to forward to my hotel any mail that might arrive. Suppose the stranger should ask the cashier who I was, and if he knew where I was stopping, and he should tell him? My running away as I did would only make matters look worse, and he would not believe me when I showed him how much I have left in my check-book."

Instinctively, his hand sought the pocket in which he had placed it. It was not there!

Thinking he might have absently removed it to a different pocket, he rapidly felt from one to the other. But his eager fingers did not close upon the book, and in utter dismay he realized it was gone.

He sprang to his feet and searched the cab, but without success.

"I may have dropped it in the express company's office," he muttered. "If I did, I am safe, because the checks are not negotiable by any one but me. I'll order the driver to return, anyway."

Signaling the man, he directed him to go back to their starting-place.

"What a fool thing to do," he muttered. "Unless I find it, I'm as badly off—no, I'm worse off—than that stranger. Because he undoubtedly has some one to cable to for money, while I have nobody."

As they neared the express office, the thought occurred to him that there was a possibility the American might not have left there, but be waiting around, hoping for the reply to his cable.

"Well, I don't care if he is," Walker declared. "I'll face him this time without compunction. It's really his fault if I dropped the check-book, because, in my haste to get away, I may not have put it in my pocket securely."

Nevertheless, he had a strong fear of meeting the man, a dread that increased to such an extent that as he neared the office he kept a careful lookout for a tall fellow in a gray suit. And it was with a feeling of relief that he sprang to the sidewalk when the cab drew up to the curb, because a quick survey of the interior of the office assured him the dreaded person had left.

Walker hurried to the cashier's window.

"I have lost my check-book," he informed that individual, "and wish to prevent payment of the checks."

The cashier looked him over carefully for a moment, then queried: "Your name, sir?"

"Walker—Stanley Walker," the dramatist answered impatiently. "You know me—I was here only a few moments ago."

"Yes, sir, I do," was the response; "but it is a form I am forced to follow. How much was there in the book?"

"Eight ten-dollar checks and one five-dollar one. I evidently dropped it right after I left here." Then he added in an appealing tone: "Please try to find it. I must have that amount to get me back to New York."

The cashier's face did not relax a particle as he slowly opened a drawer of his desk.

"I have it here, Mr. Walker. The man who was behind you saw you drop it as you ran out, and handed it to me."

Walker reached for the extended check-book, but his eyes were riveted upon the cashier's face.

"That man—that American—the one in the gray suit—found it?" he stammered.

"Yes, sir."

"What shall I do?" the playwright queried blankly. "Should I reward him? He needs money—I heard his conversation with you."

Walker now felt his position to be more complex than ever. Surely this friendless stranger was entitled to some-

thing, yet how could he afford to reward him?

Perhaps, by stinting himself, he could spare him a pound, but this amount might be considered an insult. Before these thoughts that raced through his brain had resolved themselves into any definite decision, the cashier said:

"I think he is going to hunt you up, sir. He opened the book and looked at the checks before he handed them to me, and then asked if I knew what hotel Mr. Walker was stopping at."

"And you told him?" Walker queried, aghast at the new turn of events.

"Yes, sir; fortunately, I had your address, and gave it to him."

Walker heaved a sigh of despair, so deep and sad that the cashier was alarmed.

"I hope I did right in giving it to him," he ventured.

"Yes—no—oh, it didn't matter." Then he turned abruptly and started toward his cab, the charges for which he knew were accumulating rapidly.

Again he directed the driver to his hotel, and then leaned his chin dejectedly on his hands.

"What next?" he mused. "As if I hadn't troubles enough already! If there were a cheap steamer leaving to-day, darned if I wouldn't take it and save the cost of my board and lodging till Saturday. I can get a job on a New York newspaper easily enough."

Then suddenly:

"No, I'm hanged if I will; I'll stay till Saturday, and see the game to the finish. But if I do that, I've got to keep dodging that gray-suited fellow. Because now I owe him a reward, I suppose, and I know he would not accept it. But he wants a loan; he thinks I could not refuse him, after what he's done, but as luck—my brand of luck—would have it, I've got to do so. And now he has my hotel address—that proves my theory as to what he wants—"

He paused, then added, almost plaintively: "I don't know why I am cursed with such confounded ill luck."

He was now within a block of his hotel, and at this instant he saw, crossing the street just ahead of him, the tall, gray-suited American.

Instinctively, Walker pressed as far

back as possible into the cushions, but the stranger did not look in the direction of the cab, and a sigh of relief broke from its occupant.

"I suppose he's been to the hotel to interview me," Walker muttered, "and tell me how much I am indebted to him, and that a small temporary loan would be greatly appreciated."

He glanced around as he stepped from the cab, then hurriedly paid the driver and dismissed him. He walked rapidly into the hotel lobby, and as he passed the desk the clerk called to him: "There was a gentleman here to see you only a few moments ago, Mr. Walker."

"I know it," the dramatist snapped.

"Oh, you saw him, then."

"No, I did not." Walker realized that he had said more than he intended, and added in a more genial tone: "But I felt sure some one would call this morning."

"The gentleman seemed quite disappointed not to find you in," the clerk continued. "He asked me if I knew when you would return, and as you had given me no direction, I had to tell him I did not. He said he would come back this afternoon."

"Oh, is that so?" Walker's tone was careless in the extreme.

"Yes, and he left his card and—"

"Let me see who this persistent person is," the other interrupted, reaching out his hand for the bit of pasteboard.

The clerk fumbled among some papers on his desk, then searched under it carefully, but his quest proved fruitless, and he avoided Walker's inquiring looks as he said nervously: "I had it only a minute ago, but I can't find it now. It seems to have disappeared, but I'll come across it and send it up to you."

"Don't trouble yourself. It is of small importance."

There was a sarcastic tinge to Walker's tone that the clerk mistook as being directed towards himself.

"Oh, I'll find it, sir. It must be right here."

"Very well; if you do, send it up to me. I am going to my room, and am at home to no one." Then, with more determination in his tone than usual, he repeated: "Understand me—I am at home to no one."

He turned from the desk, and, as he crossed the lobby, caught a glimpse of a person entering the hotel. It was just a fleeting glance; but it was enough. He recognized the gray-suited American.

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he sprang behind a convenient screen, without being seen by his caller, and awaited the interview between him and the clerk, being close enough easily to overhear their conversation.

"Is Mr. Walker in?" he heard the stranger inquire.

"I do not think he is," the clerk replied evasively.

"Well, find out," the stranger commanded.

"Yes, sir, of course. Page, go up to Mr. Walker's room, one hundred and fourteen, and see if he is in."

It seemed an age to the screen-sheltered dramatist before there was further conversation at the desk; and then it was the announcement by the bell-boy: "Mr. Walker is not in."

He could almost see the clerk turn to the stranger, as he heard him inquire suavely: "Is there any word you wish to leave, sir?"

"No." There seemed a thoughtfulness in his tone as he added: "But I could have sworn I saw him get out of a cab here about five minutes ago. I was standing on the next corner—oh, well, as soon as he returns tell him I called. You have my card?"

"Yes, sir—yes, sir," the clerk hastened to reply.

"Very good."

The sound of retreating footsteps told Walker the man was moving toward the door; and, after a brief wait, he emerged from his hiding-place.

"That's the man, sir," the clerk said, as the guest approached him.

"So I judged," he returned. "I didn't see him, and I don't want to. Let me look at your London guide."

The clerk hastened to produce the book; and, for some moments, Walker pored over its pages. Then, without looking up, he directed: "Make up my bill immediately, and have a cab at the door in five minutes. I'm going to leave."

"Why so soon?" the clerk broke out in amazement. "I hope, sir, it isn't be-

cause I lost the card; because I'll find it—"

"Nothing to do with it," the playwright interrupted tersely. "I'll be down in five minutes."

He stalked away from the desk; and, upon reaching his room, hastily packed his trunk and rang for the porter, after which he descended to the office again.

"We're sorry to have you go, Mr. Walker," the clerk said with real regret, "very sorry. Will you leave an address for us to forward any mail that may come?"

"There will be none," was the blunt reply. "Hence, I do not need to leave my address; but, in case there should be any letters, hold them for me. I'll communicate with you in a day or two."

Walker quickly paid his bill; then hurried to the waiting cab.

"A pretty state of affairs," he grumbled, as the vehicle rumbled off toward the address given to the driver. "Forced to move because an insistent American is determined that I shall lend him money. Confound him and his nerve!" he added vindictively.

III.

"FAIRLY decent hotel," Walker commented, as he unpacked the articles necessary for the brief stay at his new abode, "although I can't say that I should care to stop here any longer than Saturday. But it will do until then. The one great thing in its favor is that it is some cheaper than my last hotel."

"Heavens, what an existence!" he added, as he flung himself dejectedly into a chair. "It's enough to drive a person crazy, this waiting for one manager after another either to accept or turn down a play."

He took his pipe from his pocket, and, lighting it, puffed away in thoughtful silence. He was building air-castles; thinking of what would occur if Myers should accept the play.

For some unknown reason, he pinned a heap of faith to this man. He recalled the old saying, about the darkness before the dawn, and muttered: "Well, if I'm not in the deepest darkness just at present, I want to drop out of existence before it becomes any denser."

For some time after the last few flakes of tobacco in his pipe had burned out, Walker sat in the depths of a brown study; at length he stretched his limbs and roused himself.

"I shouldn't be wasting my time this way," he murmured. "I ought to be planning a new play. But I don't think I could work out the simplest missing-letter rebus just at present, much less concoct a plot. But surely I can't stay in this room all day to-day and to-morrow. Yet, I suppose I must; because, as sure as I go out, I'll come face to face with that persistent American."

"Oh, well, I've got to eat. I'm going to risk it."

He left the hotel, and made his way to a restaurant. After a simple luncheon, he strolled aimlessly around the city, taking care to avoid the Strand and the vicinity of the express station. Finally he decided to run out to Golder's Green, so headed for the nearest tube-station.

It was long after dark when he reached his hotel again. His afternoon outing had given him an appetite, and he permitted himself the extravagance of a hearty dinner, after which he soon went to bed.

"Confound it, I can't stay indoors to-day," he told himself the next morning. "I've got to get some exercise. I think, after breakfast, I'll take a stroll, and wind up at the hotel I left yesterday. It's barely possible there may be some mail there. But I do wish it was to-morrow, so I could end this uncertainty regarding Myers."

He hunted up a small restaurant, partook of a light breakfast, then walked slowly in the direction of the Strand. As he turned into this famous street, a cab pulled up at the curb beside him, and a voice exclaimed: "Why, Mr. Walker, of all people!"

The young dramatist faced about, and saw a smiling, feminine face leaning far out of a hansom.

For an instant he could not realize he was staring fixedly at Miss Hope Bailey, an actress he had often come in contact with during his newspaper experiences. His amazement quickly gave way to a broad smile of pleasure at meeting her again, and he advanced eagerly.

"Well, this *is* a surprise," he said.

"And just as much of a one for me," Miss Bailey returned, laying her hand in the one Walker had extended. "And so this is where you are keeping yourself, is it?"

"Yes, keeping myself is a good way to express it. I assure you no one is responsible for me."

"Well, why not jump in and take a spin with me," she suggested. "I will drop you any place you say."

"And I accept the invitation very gratefully," Walker returned, taking the vacant seat at the young lady's right. "Why, it's just like being in New York, to see you again. How are you getting on? As I remember it, your new play was to open a few days after I left for London."

"Splendid!" she announced gleefully. "It was the one big success of the season! Think of it—you have the honor of sitting alongside a full-fledged star. Don't you feel impressed?"

"I don't know," Walker laughed. "I can't see that the quick change from a little star into a great big one has altered you to any noticeable extent." Then his face sobered; and he added thoughtfully: "So the play was a hit, eh?"

"Indeed, it was! Why, at the Saturday matinées they had to move the orchestra under the stage."

"The play was written by Burton, wasn't it?"

"Yes; and he is certainly very clever. But how about yourself? Your last play was not very successful, was it?"

"No; not if the box-office receipts be taken as a criterion," Walker laughed bitterly. "It ran only two weeks."

"That's too bad," Miss Bailey sympathized. "I heard about it; and—why, just think, I haven't seen you since you were on the *Recorder*. You must bridge that gap of time, and tell me all that has happened in the interim."

"Really, there isn't anything to tell," the dramatist answered slowly. "I wrote the play that was a failure—so much you know. I wrote another." He paused a moment; then added grimly: "I have it yet."

"No one has accepted it?"

"No one," Walker repeated sullenly. "I came to London to market it. I

have been unsuccessful in my mission, and leave for New York on Saturday."

"Is it a woman's play?" the actress queried eagerly.

"No; it is written for a man. And, as luck would have it, all the managers claim they want a play for a woman star. I have reached the conclusion that men stars are things of the past."

"I know an actress who is looking for a good play. She is to be at my New York dinner—why, there, I never thought of it! Are you engaged for Wednesday night?"

"Until Saturday, my entire time is at my disposal," Walker replied gloomily.

"Then you must join us," Miss Bailey went on enthusiastically. "I am giving a dinner that night to the New Yorkers I know who are in London just now. You will come?"

"Thank you ever so much, and I shall be delighted to do so." The playwright's eyes glistened at the pleasant prospect.

"Here is my card. We will count on your presence. By the way, do you remember Carroll Dempster, who made the big hit in 'The Crossroads'? He is in town, and will be with us, too. I know I can assure you a jolly time."

"I don't doubt it; and I'll be mighty glad to come." There was a truly sincere ring to Walker's tone. "Just ahead is my hotel; and, if you'll drop me there, you may then continue your drive without the gloomy companion you have had for some moments."

"If you care to drive on with me, I'll guarantee to lift you out of the depths you seem to be in."

But Walker pleaded an engagement. In truth, he felt embittered against the world and himself.

It annoyed him to learn of the success of others. It only seemed to magnify the enormity of his failure. And while the meeting with Hope Bailey had been a joyous surprise, the news of what others were doing made him so disconsolate that he well knew he should only prove a bore if he acted on her suggestion.

He shook her hand warmly as he alighted in front of the hotel he had left the day previous, and with the words: "To-morrow night and let

nothing interfere," ringing in his ears, he turned toward his former hostelry and entered the lobby.

"Any mail for me?" he queried of the clerk.

"No, sir, no mail," was the reply. "But—"

"Anybody called?" he went on.

"Yes, sir; a gentleman was here late yesterday afternoon to see you."

"I don't doubt that," Walker laughed. "I hope you explained that I had left without giving any address."

"Yes, sir, I did. He seemed quite disappointed, but left his card, saying that if we heard from you to tell you that he wanted to see you as soon as possible."

"Well, of all the display of congealed nerve and brass!" the dramatist spluttered. "Let me see the card, anyway. I'd like to know who this American is."

"He isn't an American," the clerk explained. "This is the card he left."

Walker took it carelessly, allowing his eyes to glance at it inquisitively. Then an exclamation of surprise and joy burst from his lips.

"Myers!" he exclaimed. Facing the clerk, he queried eagerly: "He said he wanted to see me immediately?"

"Yes, sir; he said it was very important, and seemed quite put out to think you had left no address."

Walker hesitated a moment; then turned upon his heel and hurried to the street. Here he hailed a passing cab, and ordered the man to drive to the manager's office.

"I can't believe he has accepted the play," he kept telling himself. "It seems too good to be true! Yet what else should he be so anxious to see me about? It *must* be that!"

Although the driver was urging his horse to an unusual speed, it seemed to the now thoroughly aroused dramatist as if he would never reach his destination. But, at length, the cab drew up before the building; Walker paid the fare, and hurried within.

"I wish to see Mr. Myers," he announced to the office-boy. "Here is my card."

"Mr. Myers ain't in, sir," the boy replied, without offering to accept the card.

"Yes, he is," Walker insisted. "He sent for me—in fact, he called upon me yesterday, and not finding me in, left word for me to come here as soon as possible."

"Well, I don't know nothing about that," the boy said slowly. "But I do know he ain't in now. He was here yesterday, but he left for Paris last night."

The dramatist's face fell.

"He has gone to Paris, you say?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes; and he told me himself that he would not be back till Thursday morning. If he wants to see you, you had better come around then."

Without a word, Walker faced about, and shambled out of the office.

"It's no use!" he fairly moaned.

Then suddenly his eyes blazed fire; and he ground his teeth together.

"It's that American's fault! Of course, Myers has decided to take the play—that's certain. But the suspense of it would have been ended if I had not changed my hotel. And that man forced me to it—curse him!"

Then he calmed down, as he again found himself upon the street.

"Oh, well, it will be all right Thursday, I am certain," he told himself.

IV.

THE remainder of the day dragged slowly by, Walker feeling too impatient to busy himself with any work.

Suddenly the thoughts of his engagement for the next evening occurred to him; but he quickly decided he would not avail himself of the good time Miss Bailey had promised. He knew every one there would be successful people of the day; while he—well, he had just simply failed. He felt he could not endure the stories of their attainments—these would only accentuate his own condition.

When he had accepted the invitation the day before, this had not occurred to him; but now he saw the folly of attending. He knew he could not be himself; and his depressed spirits would certainly be noticed. It would certainly be in strong contrast with the jovial, happy people around him.

Yet Walker could not nerve himself to send his regrets. He pondered over the subject for some time, and at length reached a plan of action—he would call Miss Bailey on the phone Thursday, and plead a business engagement which came up at the last moment, and did not give him an opportunity to write.

His dinner was scarcely touched; and he hurried to his room again, where he flung himself into an easy chair. Here he sat far into the night, smoking and thinking.

The next morning he awoke to the realization that his head throbbed and ached. He felt ill—sick mentally and physically. He endeavored to eat a light breakfast, but gave it up in disgust—his stomach rebelled at the very sight of food.

It was late in the afternoon when Walker strolled out into the street, thinking the air might benefit him. Instinctively, his footsteps turned toward the building in which were located the Myers offices, and, without heeding his direction, he kept on, and was presently standing before the place. "Myers may have returned," he told himself. "I'll just drop in, anyway, and find out."

But the manager was still in Paris.

"He went over there to see some play that was to go on last night," the boy informed him. "Mr. Myers heard it was a good one, so he went over to see if he could get it. He was going to see the final dress-rehearsal."

Walker's face blanched, and he staggered at this piece of news.

Could it be Myers would take it in preference to his own? He felt completely crushed now.

He made his way slowly back to his hotel. He was glad now that he had made no preparations to accept Miss Bailey's invitation—he surely could not go now. He retired early to his room, to be alone with his discouragement.

The next morning found him in the same gloomy state of mind, although, shining through it all, there was a ray of hope. But it was so small that often it was lost completely for moments at a time; then would appear, only to be quickly swallowed once more in the darkness of despair through which he was groping.

He felt a growing repugnance for London, and began to plan for his arrival in New York. With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, he started for Myers's place again.

Although he knew the theatrical manager did not make a practise of reaching his office before eleven o'clock in the morning, Walker presented himself there about nine-thirty, hoping that by some chance Myers might arrive before his regular time. But, as the moments passed slowly, and the hands of the office clock neared the hour of eleven, the playwright's nervousness increased until it became a positive torture.

Suddenly the unkept engagement of the night before came before him. It had entirely slipped his memory during the morning, and he realized he had committed a breach of etiquette that demanded an immediate explanation of some description.

Yet he feared to leave the manager's office, feeling certain Myers might come in at any moment. And he might not stay, and—

In the midst of his thoughts, Walker's eyes had wandered to the telephone instrument upon the wall; and a resolution came to him. Here was an opportunity to phone without expense, and still remain on the watch for his quarry.

"Would you object to my using your telephone a moment?" he inquired pleasantly of the boy, forcing a smile to his face. "I have forgotten to make a call that is necessary, and if I go out to do so, I may miss Mr. Myers."

The lad did not deign to look up from the paper in which he appeared so interested.

"All right," he agreed.

Walker stepped to the instrument, and, after ascertaining the telephone number of the hotel at which Miss Bailey was stopping, removed the receiver and asked for the connection.

A brief wait; and a voice at the other end informed him: "This is the Royal—with whom do you wish to speak?"

"Miss Bailey," the playwright replied.

"Is she in?"

"I do not know; but I will find out for you," came over the wire. "Who shall I say wishes to speak to her?"

"Mr. Walker."

"Just a moment, please."

Walker knew he was not a good one at inventing excuses; and nervously rested first upon one foot, then upon the other, while he waited for the voice he had asked for.

"Anyway," he reasoned to himself, "this is better than being face to face. She cannot see my countenance giving the lie to my words."

Just then a voice which he recognized queried: "Is this you, Mr. Walker?"

"It is; and good morning, Miss Bailey," was the stammered response. "I—"

"Now make it a good excuse while you are about it," the other interrupted. "Really, I am very angry. Why did you not join us last night?"

"Business prevented!" Walker declared so positively that he was himself amazed at the truthful sound of the statement. "A manager sent for me, regarding my play, and, of course, I had to respond."

"And it was accepted, after all?" Miss Bailey inquired eagerly.

"No—not yet." Walker's tone was doleful in the extreme. "But he is looking quite favorably upon it. These things all take time, you know."

"Well, his looking favorably upon it is something," the voice remarked quietly. "But, really, you should have communicated with me. Perhaps I am selfish in even thinking this way, because I know business before pleasure every time. But Carroll was so disappointed. You see, I had told him you were to be here, and he said he wanted to see you very much."

"And who is Carroll?" Walker queried.

"Why, Carroll Dempster, foolish," was the chiding reply. "He says he knows you. You ought to know him—he made the big success in 'The Cross-roads.'"

"I remember him," the other returned. "I knew him before he was prominent."

"He said he was quite anxious to see you," Miss Bailey went on, "and asked if I knew where you were stopping. Fortunately, I remembered where I had dropped you the other day, and told him. He smiled very strangely, and said he

would call upon you. Do you know why the name of your hotel should cause him to smile?"

"I—I don't know," Walker stammered.

He was on the point of correcting her with regard to his stopping-place; but, on second thought, refrained from doing so.

"He probably only wants to tell me of his success," he mused.

"But I wish you would dine with us some evening before you go," Miss Bailey continued. "I mean, with Mr. Dempster and myself."

"Thank you; I will try to arrange it," Walker said as if he meant it. "I will communicate with you as soon as I can arrange it. There is not much time left, and I have a great deal to attend to before I leave for New York. Again I repeat my regrets regarding last evening."

"Well, I accept your apology," she laughed. "Good-by, for the present."

As Walker turned from the telephone, he heard heavy steps in the hallway; and his eyes lighted up expectantly as the manager entered the room.

"Oh, hallo, Walker; you here?" was his greeting; but the frown that gathered upon his forehead did not escape the dramatist.

"Yes, sir," he responded. "I 'am here because you sent for me."

"So I did. But I want to see what mail there is for me. Just sit down a few moments, and then I'll see you."

He nodded toward a vacant chair, and Walker settled in it, while the manager hurried on toward his private office.

For some time the playwright was kept waiting, endeavoring to draw some conclusion from Mr. Myers's words or looks. But, although he tried to reason it out from all sides, in the end he found himself as much in the dark as ever.

True, the man's frown did not forecast success; yet his words were cheerful. Then he had sent for him; and, if he did not want to see him, he could have dismissed him with a few remarks.

But just as Walker felt certain all was well, the frown would come before him, and banish the hopes he clung to so tenaciously.

The bell in the private office suddenly rang, and the boy hastened to answer the summons. He quickly returned, and ushered the dramatist into the manager's presence.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Walker," Myers began, as he fumbled idly among the papers that cluttered his desk. "But sit down a moment."

The playwright pulled up a chair, and leaned forward expectantly.

"Well, Walker, your play is a good one, and I certainly think it will make a hit when produced."

"Then you take it?" the other broke in excitedly.

"Not so fast," Myers cautioned, while Walker's face broke into a nervous smile. "After you left, Monday, I settled down to read it thoroughly. The more I read, the more I liked it; and my only wonder is that some manager did not pounce upon it long ago."

Walker's spirits soared far above *terra-firma*; and he could hardly realize that he was not dreaming, or that his ears were not playing a cruel trick upon him.

"So I decided it was just what I wanted; and, as you perhaps already know, I called at your hotel—or, at least, it was the one you gave me—to arrange matters, and get them settled up quickly. I do not need to tell you that the clerk there informed me you had departed only a short while before, leaving no new address."

The playwright stared fixedly at the man before him, only by great effort refraining from breaking in upon him and demanding an end to the uncertainty.

"I left word that if you called to tell you I wished to see you. On my way down-town, I met a friend who told me of a new play that was in the final rehearsals in Paris, and for which great things were predicted, and with the English rights still open."

Myers was not looking at Walker as he talked, so did not see the sudden change in the other's face. Indeed, the American was swaying in his chair, as if he were about to swoon. But the manager kept on.

"So I jumped over to Paris—I saw the play—and have the signed contracts for the English production here in my pocket."

He glanced up at the man before him, and his face clouded at what he saw there.

Walker's head had sunk upon his chest, and he swayed back and forth as if every few seconds he would fall to the floor. But, as the other stopped talking, the dramatist quickly braced up.

"Then you—don't want—my play?" he inquired thickly.

"I can't use two," the manager declared. "And I like this new one better than I do yours. Of course, it may not be as good; but I have seen it tried out, so I feel practically safe in taking it."

His voice lowered to one of real sympathy.

"I hope you will soon find a manager to produce yours, Walker. I really think it excellent, and—"

"Yet you don't want it yourself," Walker said, in a hollow voice.

"Why, how can I use it?" Myers returned impatiently. "Really, it's your own fault that we have not already signed our contracts. I had decided to take it, and went to find you. If you hadn't changed your hotel—"

"You'd have taken it," Walker interrupted bitterly.

"Exactly! Why, we'd already have begun to pick the cast. Here is your manuscript."

The other took it mechanically, and, for a moment, neither spoke. Walker's eyes had a far-away look in them as he stared at the opposite wall. Then his face hardened, and he burst out vindictively:

"That American! He's to blame!"

"What do you mean?" Myers queried.

"I mean—" the playwright paused, then seemingly bringing himself back to the present, a look of despair spread over his countenance—"I mean that—I've reached the end—of my rope!"

The manager stared questioningly at him; but, before he could inquire further, Walker rose from his chair and strode rapidly from the room, venting his spite upon the world in general by noisily slamming the door after him.

V.

WALKER hurried back to his hotel as one in a semiconscious condition, so

dazed was he over the terrible disappointment. He kept muttering in an undertone: "Failure! Failure!"

In fact, his actions seemed so strange to the passers-by that many of them turned and stared after him, thinking he must be mentally unsound.

When he reached his hotel he rushed directly to his room, where he remained in a sort of stupor for some time. He stared unseeing at the opposite wall, a dull, blank expression in his eyes.

Then suddenly they lighted up with a gleam of rage, and he sprang to his feet.

"That American!" he cried, as he paced up and down the narrow room; "he's to blame for it all. He forced me to change my hotel! He forced me to miss Myers! He forced me to failure!"

His teeth ground together, and he added, in a tone that almost resembled a whistle as the words shot through them: "If I had him here now, I'd do something desperate—something I would regret later."

Sheer exhaustion—mental and physical—at last caused him to slow down from the steady stride with which he had continued to pace back and forth, and a few moments later he flung himself upon the bed, where, tired out, nature quickly closed his eyes, and he fell into a heavy sleep.

The next morning he felt quite himself again. The recollection that within the next twenty-four hours he would be on his way to New York had a cheering effect. London had grown positively distasteful to him, and he looked forward eagerly to a return to his native land.

After breakfast he carefully placed his check-book in his pocket and started out for the express office, having already planned to secure the cash and then go to the steamship company's office for his ticket. It was early in the summer, so he was sure of finding accommodation.

As he stood before the cashier's window, he noticed there was a strange man behind the enclosure, and his fingers trembled with nervousness as he pushed the checks through the grating.

"By the way, Mr. Walker," the man said as he glanced at the signature,

"there was a man here yesterday, asking if we had any idea where you could be found."

The dramatist glanced up angrily, and a steely glitter showed in his eyes.

"There was?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes; and he seemed anxious to locate you. I made a memorandum of it." The fellow fumbled among some papers.

"Ah, here it is. His name is Mr. Dempster."

Walker's expression softened.

"Tell Mr. Dempster, if he calls again, that I am leaving town very suddenly," he said, "and as I will be miles away before he will know where I have been staying, it is no use leaving an address for him. Tell him—tell him—" There was just a faint trace of a choke as he added: "I may see him in New York this winter."

Walker hurried to the street after counting his money.

"I suppose I ought to see Miss Bailey before I go," he mused, "but I simply cannot nerve myself to the ordeal. Because it is an ordeal to me—forced to listen to the achievements of others. Then she would probably have callers, and—yes, Dempster might drop in, too. I shall not give him the opportunity of telling me of *his* great success, when I can't come back at him with regard to myself, except with the plain, unvarnished statement—I'm at the end of my rope. Perhaps things may change before the winter, and then I'll be glad to see him. But not now," and he shook his head decisively.

The anticipation of the trip seemed to lighten his mind of a great load as he left the steamship office. The rest of the day found him in a cheerful mood—something so new to him for so many weeks that he marveled at it. He spent the afternoon sightseeing—there were many points of interest he had overlooked—and that evening the packing of his trunk seemed to give him a new lease on life.

The next morning he awoke to find the sun streaming into his window, and this tended to increase his good spirits. He had a pleasant smile for the hotel help with whom he came in contact, and even extracted from his small supply of cash a little token for each one.

The cab that had been summoned was already waiting at the door when he descended to the office and paid his bill, while his luggage was being loaded upon the vehicle.

All Walker's troubles had faded into insignificance when he entered the carriage; the driver mounted his box, and with a snap of his whip the dramatist realized that his unsuccessful stay in London was about to draw to a close.

The cab drew up before the St. Pancras Station, where the boat train started, and the playwright watched the porters as they took charge of his baggage. It lacked a half hour of the time for the train to depart, but he made his way to his carriage and took a seat by an open window, from which point he watched the busy throng upon the platform.

So completely taken up was he with the scene before him that he did not hear his name called by a young man, and not until this same person stood directly by his window did he notice him.

"Walker, for Heaven's sake come out here a moment!" the newcomer ordered. "I *must* see you."

In surprise he turned toward the voice and recognized Carroll Dempster. For one brief second the dramatist hesitated, then he hurried to the station platform, his curiosity as to what this man wanted spurring him on.

"He can't talk very long," he consoled himself as he stopped in front of the actor.

A glance at the clock showed that the train would leave in ten minutes.

"Well, of all of the will-o'-the-wisps I've ever heard of, you are the worst," Dempster declared, wringing the playwright's hand. "I've hunted London from one end to the other, and now that I've got you just as you are leaving town, I must talk quickly. In the first place, you must stay here another week."

Walker stared at the man in astonishment.

"Why, impossible, Dempster!" he exclaimed. "I've already got my cabin."

"Never mind that," the other insisted. "Travel is light at this time of the year, and the steamship company will change your ticket for some future date. You've got to do it, because I really crossed the ocean to see you."

"I don't understand," the dramatist faltered.

Suddenly the thought that the purchase of his ticket had used up nearly all his money, and that at the present time he did not even have enough to pay for a week's stay at a good hotel, caused his positive response:

"I really couldn't do it, Dempster. I've got to get to New York on this steamer. Very important."

"Important, eh?" the other mimicked. "There is something far more important to you right here in London; and you will stay at my hotel as my guest, and go back next Saturday with Miss Bailey and myself. I want that play of yours."

"You want—my play!" cried Walker in a tone of utter astonishment.

"Yes, I want it, and I came to London to get it. I've had a merry chase after you, and now I want my answer. Do I get it?"

Before the dramatist could overcome his surprise and joy enough to reply, the train beside them pulled slowly out of the station. He had not even heard the guard's call of "All aboard!"

"Come, do I get it?" Dempster repeated.

A smile scattered itself over Walker's countenance, and he broke into a hearty yet nervous laugh.

"Of course, if you want it."

"Then come with me," the actor went on. "You are my guest for the next week. But, first of all, we'll get your steamer ticket exchanged for next week's boat. I'll telegraph ahead to hold your luggage until then."

Walker had as yet been unable fully to grasp the import of the good news, and as Dempster returned to his side and led the way to a waiting cab, he queried: "How do you know you want the play? You haven't read it, have you?"

"I certainly have," was the quick reply. "I chanced upon it in New York. Seldon & Co., the play-brokers, have a copy, and while there one day they gave it to me to read. I saw immediately what I could do with it, and after going over the script thoroughly, I put it up to my managers. They had had it some time before, they said, but

had passed it up, but were willing I should try it if I saw anything in it. Upon inquiry, I found you had gone to London, so took a trip across, killing two birds with one stone—a short vacation and an endeavor to find you."

"And you succeeded in both," Walker laughed.

"Yes, but came very near failure," the other interposed. "Ever since I saw you in the express office that morning—"

"You!" A look of blank amazement came over the dramatist's face. He stared at the other, and a look of understanding showed itself.

"Tall American—gray suit," he mumbled.

"And when I went to your hotel, and you had moved without leaving any address— Say, Walker, what ails you?"

"Nothing, really;" but the playwright smiled strangely as he made this reply.

"Well, all right, but you look comically funny; just as if you had seen a ghost. Then Miss Bailey told me she had seen you, and that you were to be with us at her dinner. But you didn't show up. I was mighty disappointed; and as she said you spoke of sailing to-day, I came down to the boat train. Luckily for me, I caught you just as—"

"Just as I reached the end of my rope," Walker interrupted.

"What do you mean?" the other queried.

"Nothing. Just a saying of mine, used in connection with theatrical managers."

"Well, I felt I had reached the end of mine, as far as securing a play for Miss Bailey and myself was concerned," Dempster said; then in a cautious whisper added: "It's a secret, Walker, but I'll let you in on it. Miss B. and I are engaged to be married, and I guess it'll take place as soon as we get to New York. Naturally, we would like to play together, and although the majority of managers object to such an arrangement, mine have consented, providing we find the play."

"But mine is a man's play," Walker said fearfully.

"I know it; but there is a fine part for Miss Bailey, and we have a new idea regarding it whereby it can be

greatly strengthened. That work is up to you. If you agree, as soon as we strike Broadway, you'll get the signed contracts and the advance royalties. Is it a bargain?"

"Here's my hand on it," was Walker's answer.

"Bully!" cried Dempster in his hearty way. "Just ahead is the steamship office. We'll get your tickets changed; then, on to my hotel."

The cab pulled up at the curb, and both men sprang to the pavement.

"While you're inside, I'm going to telephone Miss Bailey," Dempster said. "You see, I told her nothing of my plans regarding your play until yester-

day morning. I wanted to surprise her Thursday night with the good news. She told me then you had phoned her, but she did not know where you were. The clerk at the hotel where she dropped you informed us that you had left."

"And so I had," Walker turned and looked the other straight in the eyes. "Do you know, Dempster, that but for you I would have placed my play with Myers, the manager?"

"How is that?" the other queried in surprise.

"Never mind now. This sidewalk is not the choicest place to converse. I'll explain some day."

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS START.

By BURKE JENKINS.

The sad state of an ambitious young man
doomed forever to be a trailer and worse.

THE astrologer swore roundly, though not in Persian, when the little bell tinkled cheerily in announcement of another arrival.

Of course it meant more money, but even so public a servant as a reader of the stars for struggling humanity certainly must have some time to himself. It was already eleven-thirty, and he had made it a rule to give no audiences later than eleven.

Indeed, when was he to get any sleep? Did he not have a date with a star that was to rise about 2 A.M., the meeting to take place on his roof, with a telescope as chaperon?

But though he grumbled thus, Chanedra, the soothsayer, whose advertisement appeared every Sunday, tucked his feet into his tasseled slippers, drew on his somber cloak, dropped into his most effective stride, opened the door, and gave entrance to his visitor.

That the young fellow who rushed in excitedly needed something was most evident, and perhaps he was right in thinking that here was the place he could get it.

"You are Chanedra, the astrologist?" he cried wildly.

"I am," admitted Chanedra calmly, both for effect and to moderate the other's nervousness. "Won't you be seated?"

The young man sat down tentatively on the very edge of the chair indicated and jumped into wordiness.

"Now, it isn't that I've got any faith in predictions or fortune-telling, or anything of that sort," he began, "but it's just as the very last resort. This thing's got to be stopped; it's got to be explained, or something. It's getting too much for me!"

"Just a minute, my dear fellow," interrupted Chanedra coldly. "If you have no faith, why are you here? And if I am to follow your story, suppose you begin with some common source that both of us can understand."

The evenness of the astrologer's tone told upon the youth.

"I never noticed the thing until after I had graduated from college," he went on in a far more collected manner. "Indeed, the very first instance was the time I tried to start *The Galloper*."

"You are still too vague for me," broke in the seer.

"Well, then, I'll state facts as clearly

as I can. As I indicated, I graduated some four years ago. I was accounted bright enough in my studies, and ranked well enough up. I was rather versatile of accomplishments and found some difficulty in deciding upon my vocation in life. Finally, however, it seemed best to me to start a newspaper in a small way, for I had been particularly successful in college journalism.

"Accordingly, I rented a little plant with a front office, and got out a first edition of what I was pleased to call *The Galloper*. I worked pretty hard on the make-up of the sheet, and was more than satisfied when I scanned it over before I sent it out. But not fifteen minutes after the papers left the place an acquaintance of mine came trotting into the office.

" 'Well,' said he, with a grin, 'I'm blamed if I can see the joke in the thing, Dobson; but I suppose it's some new advertising wrinkle of yours.'

" 'What're you talking about?' I asked him.

" 'Why, look here.' He slipped from his pocket a copy of my new paper, *The Galloper*, then he once more fished into his coat and brought out another paper.

" 'Look at the date on this,' said he.

" 'Why, it's the 30th,' said I. 'It's my first issue.'

" 'Now look at this one,' and he proffered the other sheet to me.

"That paper, which bore the strongest possible likeness to my own, was dated the 29th.

" 'What the—'

" 'And what's more,' continued he, 'I bought this paper yesterday.'

" 'What!' I cried.

" 'Then you know nothing of it?'

" 'Not I,' I answered truthfully, but he went away, laughing at what he took for my drollery.

"Three more days I tried to run that paper, but every one of my editions had been duplicated and set on sale; and, mark you this, *before*, a day before, I had printed them myself, or indeed had even written half of them. Somebody certainly had a wonderful scoop on me.

"Then, one night, I had an idea come to me while I was in bed. It was a patent for an automatic door-opener. It was practical in every detail—worked to a

nicety. I got out my model of it and sent it to Washington.

"The result? After the customary delay, I received a letter, along with my model, which was therewith returned. The letter stated that, by the most remarkable coincidence, they had issued the patent rights upon an identical affair such as mine, which they had received the very day before mine arrived at the patent office. The letter even intimated that they wondered how I should have got hold of the idea so soon. Can you beat that?

"Then I wrote a novel and took it to a publisher. I saw his brow cloud as he scanned the opening sentences of my manuscript; then he turned on me sharply.

" 'You made a little mistake in bringing this particular manuscript to me,' said he, 'for it happens that I have just, only yesterday, consented to publish the *original*.'

"The thing was getting on my nerves by now. Four other attempts I made to forestall my unseen and premature copyist. Until finally to-night the last straw fell on me. I'm not boring you?"

"Scarcely," answered the astrologer softly.

"Of course, you must know," the young man continued, "that my best efforts to succeed in the world were being put forth in the hope of inducing a certain young lady to share her fortunes with—"

"A-ha!" sibilated Chanedra. "They are always in things."

"Yes," assented the other, "and this very night, frenzied almost beyond myself, I rushed over to her house, threw myself at her feet, and poured out my love for her. Would she come to me and let us make our way together?"

"And the result?"

"Listen. She was kind; too kind, for I guessed even before she had said it. Only last night she had been proposed to and had accepted that mythical, mystical enemy of mine!"

"What!" cried the astrologer, betrayed into genuine surprise. "You have even seen this other?"

"Oh, how I've tried! But something, almost uncanny, always prevents my running up with him. He's a veritable will-

o'-the-wisp to me, though he's anything but such to others.

"But, tell me, have you ever heard of such a case? Am I losing my mind? Can you help me?"

Chanedra rose languidly and stepped over to where a ponderous volume lay open upon a small table.

"Where were you born?" he asked as he turned the pages.

"I was born in Philadelphia."

"When? Be exact as to time."

"The morning of July 26, 1873."

For a full five minutes the seer consulted the page; then he turned slowly upon his caller and said:

"There is little I can do for you, young man. But I can help you to understand the most unfortunate circumstances under which you were born."

"How? What?" the other cried eagerly.

"Well, it happened that upon the morning of the 25th of July of that very year, and in the self-same city of Philadelphia, this 'other' you speak of was born. You see the significance, don't you? The same stars ruled the planets at that time; and so the same destinies will be yours. But with this exception—he has twenty-four hours start of you!"

"You must be mistaken. You're chaffing me. How do you know when the fellow was born, anyway? A-ha, now I've got you!"

"Have you? Well, it appears that again he had the head start of you; for in this very room, at this very hour last night, I gave him a reading and advised him to propose to the girl."

"Great Heaven! And I? Must I go through my entire life doing the things this scoundrel does on the following day?"

"I see no other way," answered the seer compassionately.

"Then I'll kill myself!" cried the miserable young man.

"I'm afraid even that is denied you," answered Chanedra calmly, "for, as he happens to have achieved the object of his heart, and sees a happy life before him, it seems to me that he will be the last man to commit suicide. Of course, you understand that he must do the deed the day before you can ever hope to carry out the purpose."

Then it was, on that instant, that the visitor dashed madly out into the midnight; while Chanedra, the astrologer, folded another dollar bill among the others, winked at the telescope, and crawled into bed.

IT IS THE MAN.

By MARIE B. SCHRADER.

A story about two men and a woman, with an experiment in boat-sailing as an important episode in the game.

"JUST what I wanted."

Edward Grant threw down the letter, but quickly picked it up again, and read it over again carefully.

"Talk about the force of thought, and all that sort of thing, I would like to know how you explain this," he said to the friend who was whiling away an hour of a dull afternoon in idle chat.

"What is it?" inquired the visitor.

"A prospective sale of property?"

"I wish it were," answered the real-estate man. "Not business. Pleasure pure and simple, and I mean to forget that there is such a word as 'property.'"

"Easily said," returned his companion, "but in times like the present it is, I fear, a subject which can't readily be dismissed."

"Business is dull," went on Grant; "and that's one reason why I am glad to escape for a while from the worry of it. For several days I have been thinking of leaving town, but hadn't settled upon a definite plan. I tried to remember where my different friends spend their week-ends, but couldn't locate a single one of them. Just when I had about determined to remain at home along comes this invitation. It's from

Hudson. You know Wellington Hudson."

"The fellow who won the race last year with his yacht, the Sylphide?"

"The same," answered Grant. "He's a bully sort. Money to burn; and he burns it, too. Two automobiles and property galore. All he has to think about is what he will do to amuse himself. For the past month he has been at Athol Beach. He wants me to join him for a visit. Needless to say I shall not think twice before accepting. Here goes."

With these few words Grant rang a messenger call and busied himself with the wording of his telegram, which consisted of the one word, "Delighted."

"I don't believe in stringing out a wire to ten words just because I have the privilege of sending that many for the same cost as one," he explained in answer to his friend's expression of surprise at his brevity.

"When do you leave, Grant?"

"As soon as I can pack my steamer-trunk. The first train out will suit me."

"But what about business matters?"

"There are none. My assistant, Brown, will attend to everything. I am not going to Europe, you know, and can get back on short notice."

He looked at his watch.

"I must hurry if I am to catch that three o'clock train. It is usually crowded on Fridays. So long, old chap."

"By the way, Grant, don't drift into a summer flirtation while wading in the briny."

"Oh, don't worry. I can take care of myself. Besides, I am not susceptible. I have the technique down fine, but I never have put my heart in the game. Then, too, flirtations are, to say the least, expensive."

He hustled things, and was set down at his friend's stopping-place late that afternoon.

He looked around for Hudson, and discovered that gentleman at one end of the piazza, almost completely concealed from view by a circle of young women of various types and ages. They were all enthusiastic over something he was telling them, which later proved to be nothing newer than the old, old story of how his yacht won the race.

They had all heard it before, but no one was willing to admit that fact. Men were too scarce to worry over their petty weaknesses.

"Hallo, Grant!" exclaimed Hudson, with a genuine tone of hearty welcome in his voice. "Your telegram said, 'Delighted.' The expression is mutual. I never was so glad to see anybody in my life."

Thereupon he introduced every woman in the circle. Grant scanned them all casually, and then his host excused himself, and the two strolled off down the piazza.

"Now, old chap," said Hudson, "turn yourself loose. The place is yours. We will do anything you say, go anywhere you like. What do you think of the ladies?"

Grant gave him a bored look.

"Oh, I know how you size them up," went on Hudson; "but what is a fellow to do? One must have society of some kind. And, after all, they mean well."

"Oh, these people who mean well!" complained Grant. "To tell the truth, it would be a refreshing change to find some one who isn't so anxious to please."

"There is one of that very type right here in this hotel," said Hudson. "I have been wondering how she exercises such a powerful fascination over all the men. The women hate her. That goes without saying. She is the sort who doesn't care about anybody or anything, unless she wants to, and several men have already proved that she doesn't want to care about them. She says what she thinks regardless of the results."

"I don't intend to give you the idea that she is rude. Nothing of the sort. She is only thoroughly independent. A spoiled child. Has had her own way all her life; and is dreadfully stubborn in consequence."

"I see," remarked Grant. "Every man bows before her, consequently she doesn't care about any of them."

"That's it exactly," answered Hudson. "How well you understand. She is utterly different from any other girl you ever met before."

"Is she?" inquired Grant, with a quizzical look. "Do you know much about women?"

"My dear boy, they are like open

books to me. All their little idiosyncrasies of temperament—all their petty tricks. Why, I have never met one who could mystify me."

"Except this one?"

"Well, yes; except this one."

"And you are in love with her?"

"How did you guess it?"

"Intuition, I suppose."

"I don't mind owning that I am. However, I am not alone. I wish I were. Every man in the hotel is mad about her. She is young, beautiful, and wealthy. What more could one desire?"

"Nothing," replied Grant, "if all you say is true. But, old fellow, you've got to show me. I've heard of these paragons of beauty and wealth before, and the description given me by the infatuated man was never a true likeness of the baffling original. No detective could have used it as a trustworthy aid in a search for the heroine."

"Wait until you see her," said Hudson. "She's out on the Walk now."

"Sorry I must restrain my impatience," rejoined Grant, with a good-natured smile. "She probably won't pay any attention to me, either."

"I guess you're right."

"Well, I like that," said Grant, somewhat piqued.

"Have you registered yet? No? Come right up to the desk. Then we will go up to your room."

"Hudson, you're too kind."

"Nothing of the sort. Come, we will go up and look things over."

For a moment Hudson appeared embarrassed, then added in a hesitating voice:

"I have engaged the room next hers for you."

"You did. How singular that you should chance to get it?"

"Singular? Nothing of the sort. I had all kinds of trouble in getting it. You see, old fellow, I have been just a little bit selfish in inviting you down here. My rooms are on the next floor, and I thought that when you came down—er—the walls are very thin—and when we talked—er. You see, her room is right next to yours, and—"

"I understand," broke in Grant. "You intend that we shall have some confidential chats concerning your appreciation

of her charms. She, quite by accident, of course, will overhear us, and her estimation of you will go up ninety per cent."

"My dear boy, you've struck it. How clever you are."

At this point in the conversation they entered the elevator. As Grant removed his hat he looked up, and there beside him stood one of the prettiest young women he had ever seen.

There was a certain modesty, combined with independence, in her bearing, that attracted him instantly, and when she raised her large brown eyes they seemed to go straight through him.

Hudson greeted her warmly.

"How did you enjoy your afternoon, Miss Wakefield?" he inquired politely.

"Oh, immensely," she replied, with a sweet smile.

Grant pinched Hudson's arm.

"Oh, Miss Wakefield," went on Hudson, "may I present my friend, Mr. Grant, of New York?"

Miss Wakefield recognized the introduction with a charming, but indifferent smile.

Hudson gave Grant a significant look, as much as to say, "How did that strike you?" but that gentleman merely returned the greeting perfunctorily, and then turned his head the other way.

All three stepped out on the same floor. The young woman nodded to them, and walked rapidly down the hall. Hudson and Grant strolled leisurely after her.

"So that's the wonderful creature?" exclaimed Grant.

"How did you figure it out?" asked Hudson in surprise.

"Oh, she's the only one who came anywhere near your glowing description," answered Grant nonchalantly.

Miss Wakefield had already disappeared within her room as the two entered the adjoining one.

"Well, here we are," said Hudson. "I'll stay down for a while. It's time to dress for dinner. You can go ahead while I talk; then we will go up to my room, and you can talk while I dress."

He leaned over to Grant, and added in a whisper:

"She can hear every word. I will start the conversation now, and you must help me out."

"I understand," whispered Grant in return. "Fire away. Now, let me see, you want to impress her with the intensity of your admiration. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"That's it," answered Hudson in a whisper. "Here goes."

"The young lady I introduced you to in the elevator is the one I have told you so much about," he went on in tones a little louder than he ordinarily employed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Grant. "You don't mean it?"

"Why, you say that as if you were surprised," returned Hudson.

"Well, I was," admitted Grant. "You told me she was very beautiful and charming and—"

Hudson slapped him approvingly on the back and whispered:

"Old man, you're all right. Keep it up. Keep it up."

Then, aloud, he continued:

"So I did. Words are inadequate to express all that I would like to say about her. There isn't another girl in the place who can compare with her. Now, isn't she all that I have said. Isn't she the most beautiful—"

"That's just it," broke in Grant. "A moment ago you said that I appeared surprised when I discovered that she was the object of your adoration, and the reason was—"

He hesitated a moment, then added in resounding, even tones:

"Hudson, I can't agree with you. You have greatly overestimated her charms. She must have hypnotized you."

Hudson looked blankly at Grant for a moment, then said in a low voice:

"By Jove, old chap, you're a born actor! For a moment I almost thought, you meant every word of it. However, I didn't expect you to go as far as that."

"As far as what?" asked Grant.

"Why, most fellows would have tried to beat me out at the game of winning her good opinion. They would move heaven and earth to let her know how much they admire her. Instead of that you are deliberately ruining yourself with her, while my stock goes way up. I couldn't have asked you to do such a thing, but it's a great idea. Blaze away."

Hudson chuckled to himself, as Grant continued in a loud voice:

"And you think she is beautiful?"

"Very," answered Hudson enthusiastically; "and so graceful."

"I consider her only rather pretty. She certainly has no pretensions to beauty," went on Grant. "Have you met Miss Anderson? Now, I wouldn't hesitate one second in calling her a beauty. Then, there's the Selden-Mason girl. She's another. I could name any number who have your 'beauty' left at the post. As for grace, she is not awkward, but she isn't graceful either."

"Grant, I won't permit you to say such things. You must be blind."

"I am," responded Grant, "as far as some women are concerned. By the way, there's a favor I want to ask of you."

"Anything you like, old man," said Hudson.

"It is this. Don't mention to Miss Wakefield that I am anything but a plain, ordinary man. Promise me."

"Certainly," answered Hudson.

"For instance," continued Grant, "you needn't mention my financial standing."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of speaking about that," replied Hudson.

"Good. I wouldn't care to have her know about my real estate and all that. The moment you say properly some women imagine that you are so much richer than you are. By the way, I got rid of that million-dollar piece of land the other day. It has been bothering me to death. I didn't know what to do with it. Now, I don't have to think about the thing any more. So, you see, I have nothing to worry me while down here."

"That's fine," exclaimed Hudson. Then he returned to his subject. "Miss Wakefield is very intellectual," he said.

"Is that so?" inquired Grant. "One would never imagine it. By the way, Hudson, don't mention the fact that I write, will you? And don't, by any chance, tell any one that I can play the piano. Some time I will play you my latest composition, but not down here. I want to get away from all these things. My latest novel will be out soon. I'll send you a copy. After I am gone you can mention these facts, but at present I prefer to be plain Edward Grant. No-body can possibly interest me, so I don't want to be bothered with answering questions about what I have done."

"My dear Grant," said Hudson in a low voice, "you have finished yourself completely. To tell the truth, I was just a bit afraid of you as far as Miss Wakefield was concerned, but after all you have just said she won't even look at you."

"Tell her any old thing you like about me," returned Grant in a loud voice, "except the truth. Tell her I am a bookkeeper, if you care to do so."

As he finished, Grant looked at his watch.

"You have just fifteen minutes to get into your evening clothes," he said.

II.

A QUARTER of an hour later the two men found themselves on the way to the dining-room. Hudson stopped to talk with a tall, dignified elderly woman, who proved to be Mrs. Wakefield. She took an immediate liking to Grant, much to Hudson's discomfiture, for, try as he might, he had never succeeded in impressing the lady with his good points.

He was rather surprised when she invited him and his friend to join herself and daughter at their table.

"Mr. Wakefield and my sister have gone to New York," she explained, "so there will be two vacant places."

Needless to say, Hudson was delighted. Grant accepted as a matter of course. Miss Wakefield joined them a little later, and Grant found himself in close touch with her. However, he permitted Hudson to fill all the spare time for small talk that the young woman donated.

Hudson put forth his best powers of conversation, and when the meal was half over was so satisfied with his own efforts that he conveyed his pleasure thereat by covert glances at Grant.

Miss Wakefield only spoke to the newcomer now and then, and he never ventured to endeavor to draw her into a chat. It was always she who introduced the various topics.

Everything of interest at the seaside resort was discussed, and then Miss Wakefield mentioned the titles of several popular novels which she had read. She criticized them in regard to characters and plots, until Grant remarked:

"You seem greatly interested in books, Miss Wakefield?"

"Oh, I am," she replied. "Aren't you?"

"Not at all," answered Grant, giving Hudson a look, as if to command silence on his part.

"How strange!" exclaimed Miss Wakefield. "I am rather a good student of the peculiar characteristics of different persons, and from my experience in analyzing faces, heads, and hands I should say that you ought to be exceedingly interested in literature of all kinds."

"There is only one book I read," said Grant; "but that one doesn't consume much of my time, and I don't enjoy it. I read it completely through from start to finish in two glances. The end is a sad one."

"And what book can that be?" asked Miss Wakefield, with undisguised curiosity.

"My bank-book, of course," replied Grant with a smile, and turned his attention to Mrs. Wakefield.

He was apparently absorbed in listening to her remarks, but distinctly heard Miss Wakefield say to Hudson:

"Your friend seems to be a clever fellow."

"Think so?" answered Hudson carelessly. "By the way, Miss Wakefield, what about that sailing party?"

"Oh, I haven't thought much about it, beyond suggesting that we have one," was the reply.

Then she returned to Grant and inquired:

"Are you fond of the water, Mr. Grant?"

"I love it," he answered.

"So do I," she continued, with enthusiasm. "Many persons don't care much about it—that is, about sailing. If it is a trifle rough, you know—"

"I understand," broke in Grant. "Rough weather never affects me. I am a good sailor. That's about the only accomplishment I possess. The rougher the better for me."

"It must be great to be out in a storm?" went on the young lady.

"I've been in a number of them. Got upset several times, and so forth. Just escaped drowning, and all that."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Wakefield in

admiration. "You must tell me all about your experiences."

Hudson frowned. The idea of Grant figuring as the hero in a series of romantic happenings didn't exactly appeal to him. Accordingly, he sought to "butt into" the conversation.

"Miss Wakefield is a splendid sailor," he said; "and she can sail a boat with the best of them. She has promised to look over my yacht when it comes down, haven't you, Miss Wakefield?"

"Yes," answered the girl politely. "But tell me, Mr. Grant, do you know anything about boats?"

"I have studied them all my life," was the reply.

"Well, then," continued Miss Wakefield, "perhaps you can settle a disputed point for me. It all centers about the management of a sailboat. The most fascinating chapter in 'The Green of the Sea' contains a situation which I consider impossible. I'm curious to know what you think of it, both from a literary standpoint as well as from the possibility of the thing. I believe that such episodes must be accurately described or not at all. Then, too, I want your opinion concerning the construction of the various chapters."

"But, Miss Wakefield," interrupted Hudson, "Grant knows nothing about such matters. He is not interested in books. Are you, Grant?"

Hudson gave his friend a piercing look.

"Absolutely not," quickly answered Grant.

"Oh, I had forgotten that," said Miss Wakefield; "but you do know about boats, so that is enough. I will explain the entire story to you, and you can give me your ideas. You must have some ideas, you know, even if you don't wish to have them," she added, with a charming smile.

A few moments later the dinner-party broke up, and the four people wandered out on the veranda.

"What do you say to a stroll on the beach?" suggested Hudson.

"Just the thing," replied Miss Wakefield. "Come with us, mother. Mr. Hudson will take care of you, while Mr. Grant and I finish our little discussion about the book."

With these words she gathered up her skirts and, taking Grant's arm in a friendly fashion, as if she had known him all her life instead of but a few hours, started down the steps to the Boardwalk.

Hudson stood for a moment as if petrified. He couldn't say or do anything. In the meantime the two figures were rapidly disappearing in the crowd.

It was Mrs. Wakefield's voice that brought Hudson back to a sense of the conventionalities, and politeness.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Hudson, will you excuse me? My daughter is such a walker. It is difficult for me to keep up with her. Suppose you leave me and join Elizabeth and your friend. If you hurry I am sure you can overtake them."

"I don't think I shall bother about doing that," replied Hudson, trying his best to control his feelings.

After he had found a chair for Mrs. Wakefield he took himself to a dark corner of the piazza, where he smoked a cigar and muttered into his mustache all the expressive words of his vocabulary.

The moon was sailing high when, from his sequestered refuge, Hudson descried Grant and Miss Wakefield returning from the Boardwalk. They were laughing and chatting in high spirits as they came up the steps and strolled down the piazza toward him.

He saw them looking at the occupants of the rocking-chairs. Finally they reached him.

"Ah, here he is!" exclaimed Grant.

"Where did you and mother disappear to?" inquired Miss Wakefield. Then, without waiting for an answer: "We have had such a delightful evening, haven't we, Mr. Grant? We didn't notice that you two people were not following us until we reached the Casino. We were so interested in the boat question."

"Well," asked Hudson, with grim politeness, determined to die game, "did you settle it?"

"Not yet," answered Grant.

"But we will to-morrow," added Miss Wakefield. "Mr. Grant and I are going to get up at six o'clock and take a sail. There is nothing like practical demonstration in order to prove things. Now,

he contends that the boat could be handled as it was in the book, and I say it can't. By luncheon to-morrow we will give you the solution."

"I shall await it with intense interest," remarked Hudson, with a tinge of sarcasm.

"Now, Mr. Grant," cautioned the girl, "be sure you are awake at six and ready at six-thirty."

"I'll believe it when I see him. He won't be waiting for you. It's a safe bet," said Hudson.

"You may depend upon me, Miss Wakefield," put in Grant. "I would sit up all night if necessary."

With these words the young woman said good night and left the two men to themselves.

Neither spoke for a few minutes. Then Hudson lit a fresh cigar and remarked:

"So you enjoyed yourself?"

"Now, look here, old man. I know how you feel about it, but if you will think a moment you will see that I am not to blame. I understand, and perhaps I would be in the same sort of a humor if I were in your place. The plain truth is, the girl likes you, but she doesn't love you."

"What!" exclaimed Hudson in a rage. "You have the nerve to tell me this to my face?"

"Yes, I have, because I am sure you can see things as I do. Miss Wakefield knows that you are in love with her; that you want to spend all your time and all your money at her command. Despite all this, what does she do? Walks off with a man she had only known a few hours."

"I suppose you mean me to draw the conclusion that she is madly in love with you—a case of love at first sight?" sneered Hudson.

"Nothing of the sort, old chap. Leave me out of it. I don't count. I have only arrived. You have been here a month. You have been with her every day of that time. Now, turn back the calendar and see if you have made any progress in her affections. The best proof that you have not is the fact that you sent for me to help matters along."

"And a fine mess you have made of things, too," savagely remarked Hudson.

"You might as well be sensible about it," continued Grant. "What's the use of worrying your soul out about somebody who refuses to worry about you? Didn't I do everything under the sun to follow out your instructions?"

"Yes, you did," answered Hudson.

"Then, why blame me?" asked Grant. "You can't make a woman love you if she doesn't want to. Now, can you?"

"You're right, Grant. I'm several kinds of a fool. It isn't your fault. You've played square. She seems to be greatly taken with you, but you said you didn't admire her particularly. It would serve her right to fall in love with some one who didn't return the feeling. She would get a dose of what I have had. Go as far as you like, old chap, but don't lose your heart."

"I'm not very susceptible," answered Grant evasively, "but I will say that she has a charming personality."

"After a while you will suddenly discover that she is beautiful," said Hudson suspiciously.

"Maybe."

III.

THE next morning, bright and early, Grant and Miss Wakefield set out for their sailing trip. They returned, half-starved, in the middle of the afternoon.

"Did you settle the question?" asked Hudson.

"Why, no," answered Miss Wakefield, with a blush. "We became interested in other things, and forgot all about it."

"We are going out again," explained Grant. "Besides, we couldn't have settled the matter to-day, for the sea was smooth. It is necessary for it to be rough."

For several days Hudson barely saw Grant except at meals; for Miss Wakefield was always needing his services.

"I say, Hudson, I don't feel quite right in leaving you out, as I am your guest," he remarked more than once.

"Oh, that's nothing, Grant. Miss Wakefield invites me; but I know she does it merely from a sense of courtesy. How are you getting along?"

"Famously."

"Have you discovered that she is beautiful yet?"

"Not yet; but she is graceful. Quite intellectual, too!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hudson, with a world of meaning in his tone. "By the way, have you put at rest that eternal dispute over the boat?"

"No; but I am sure you will be relieved to learn that it is to be settled to-morrow."

"Good!" said Hudson. "And you are going to get up at six again?"

"Sure. I can't miss it this time, for she has promised to set her alarm-clock right by the door which separates our two rooms."

"So," muttered Hudson. "You've reached that stage, have you?"

The next day the alarm-clock aroused Grant at the promised hour. By six-thirty the two young people were on their way to where their boat lay.

"The sea is just right this time," remarked Miss Wakefield. "We won't forget why we came, will we?"

"I'll try not to," answered Grant, with a long, admiring glance which caused her suddenly to turn her head the other way.

They were soon seated in the boat, and sailing gaily over the choppy sea. The girl again explained the details of the chapter to him, and they maneuvered with the sail.

"You see, it could happen just as I said," concluded Grant.

"Then I was wrong?" asked Miss Wakefield.

"Yes. I am sorry."

"Oh, I don't care."

"It won't hurt you to be in the wrong once," went on Grant. "It would spoil you always to be right."

"See here," interrupted the girl, "do I look like the sort of person who could be spoiled?"

"No. Come to think of it, you couldn't be," answered Grant. "Although, to tell the truth, when I first came down here I did think so. I take it all back now. Will you forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," she answered.

"Isn't this an ideal day?" he asked, with quick change of subject.

"Perfect. The sky, the sea, and—" she hesitated—"everything is so congenial."

Grant looked at her; but she was gazing out at the horizon.

"The sky and the sea," he repeated. "What about ourselves?"

"Ourselves?" she asked, with an uncertain query in her voice.

"Yes; us two! Are we congenial?"

"Why—" She paused, not knowing just what to say.

"Shall I answer the question for myself?"

She nodded, and began playing with a piece of rope that lay coiled near by.

"You won't feel offended?"

"No," she said in a low voice, waiting for his next words.

"I have never known any girl like you," he went on. "Why, there's so much to you. You! That little word spells everything that is good and beautiful and—and sensible. So few women have real sense. But you've got it. I would rather be with you than all the other girls in the world put together."

"Mr. Grant!" she exclaimed, quite overcome.

"I mean it; although I didn't intend to tell you so to-day. I wish that this boat could sail on and on with us two, and never go back to land again."

"Oh, that would be lovely," she exclaimed, quite carried away by his glowing words, and hardly realizing that she had seriously committed herself.

"Do you mean it?" he almost shouted.

"Oh," she said. "I—I—"

Grant nearly fell over the side of the boat in his haste to reach her; and if they had been closer to land, the bathers would have seen their first kiss.

IV.

WHEN the first happy realization of their mutual affection was over, they began planning the manner in which they would break the news to Mrs. Wakefield and Hudson.

"We can tell them how we maneuvered with the sail," said Elizabeth, "and then we can gradually lead up to— By the way, we never did finish that point about the construction of the novel."

"Why, I know nothing about writing novels," said Hudson.

"Oh, yes, you do, too, you dear boy,"

insisted Elizabeth. "You are a wonderful man. I can't compare with you. I am nothing but a girl of average ability; while you, you are a genius."

"I! A genius? I'm nothing of the sort," protested Grant.

"You're too modest. But there's one thing I admire about you."

"Look here, little girl, what put it into your head that I am a genius?"

"Why, you did yourself! And you didn't want to let me know all the wonderful things you can do."

"I don't as yet quite understand," said Grant.

"I know all about you," continued the other. "All about your novels and your musical compositions, and your real estate."

"Oh," exclaimed Grant, as the full meaning of her words dawned upon him.

"Yes," she continued, "I must say that you used original tactics. The others were not willing to go on their own merits, but were obliged to resort to artificial methods to attract me. But you, on the contrary, concealed from me your true identity; and if walls had not ears, I should not have been the wiser."

She threw both arms around his neck in an impulsive, girlish manner, and added:

"You're the finest man I've ever met."

Grant disengaged himself from her embrace, and, taking her two hands in his, looked her full in the eyes.

"Girlie," he said, "I'm afraid your estimate of me will change when you realize what 'original methods' I used."

A peculiar smile came over his glowing face.

"I have no excuse to make for my actions," he added. "I throw myself absolutely on your mercy."

Elizabeth looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked.

"Simply this," replied Grant. "I saw the mistakes that all these other fellows had made in trying to win you; and, realizing the fact that you were not to be dazzled by hollow pretension, and also knowing that you are not the ordinary type of girl, I determined that it was the man himself who would count most in your esteem. Acting on that

supposition, and, at the same time, playing 'square' with my friend Hudson, who did realize that walls have ears, I decided to reverse the usual order of procedure.

"Instead of posing as a genius, and trying to carry out the bluff, I simply appeared as myself, a person of no accomplishments whatever—only a young business man who has yet to make his mark in the world. You are the only girl I ever cared for. What you think of me now, I don't know; but I ask you again, will you be my wife?"

Grant stood before her, with strength showing in every muscle, and honesty and determination in his face, as the boat neared the shore.

Elizabeth did not hesitate a moment. She placed her hands in his.

"Your power of discernment did not mislead you," she said. "It is the man who has won my heart and hand."

"Do you really mean it?" exclaimed Grant, hardly crediting his senses.

For an answer, Elizabeth looked at him with a glance the meaning of which he could not fail to read. At this moment the sail swept around, hiding them from the view of those on the shore; and Grant held her in his arms for one brief moment, while their lips met.

V.

HUDSON was the first person to greet them as they stepped ashore. His primary inquiry was:

"Well, have you settled the question?"

"Yes, old man, the great question has been settled; and you are the first one to offer congratulations!"

"What?" exclaimed Hudson.

"It's the truth, Hudson; I've won," answered Grant, taking Elizabeth's hand.

Hudson proved equal to the situation, and promptly extended his felicitations. Then, in a mischievous way, he asked:

"Do you think she is beautiful now?"

"I never thought otherwise, from the moment I first saw her," answered Grant, as the three strolled toward Mrs. Wakefield, who, comfortably seated on the beach, was reading a book which was none other than "The Green of the Sea!"

AN ENTICING PROSPECT.

By RALPH ENGLAND.

The matter of mountain air, pretty girls, and restful
quiet in selecting a location for a summer holiday.

"WHAT you need, my boy," said the doctor, examining my tongue with some concern, "is a few weeks of thorough rest.

"Your system is badly run down. You've been working too hard, I presume. You require recreation more than medicine. Go out into the country. Select a nice, quiet place up in the mountains. Loaf there for two or three weeks. Don't worry. Don't do anything except bask in God's glorious sunshine, and fill your lungs with fine, clear, crisp mountain air. That is all—except my bill, which is five dollars, please."

I handed the physician his fee and went home to look over the summer resort advertisements in the daily papers, in search of a suitable spot in the mountains where I could take the rest cure prescribed and endeavor to restore my shattered nervous system.

There was apparently no dearth of such places. All advertisements sounded so alluring that it was extremely difficult to make a selection.

Each advertiser claimed that his particular retreat was the best in the world. Each declared that the air to be breathed on his premises was the very finest brand of air to be breathed anywhere.

As for the quality of the food and sleeping accommodations, and the natural beauties of the surrounding scenery, none of the resort-keepers who advertised was willing to yield first place in these important respects.

The advertisements varied in phraseology, of course. Some of them were written in the first person, some in the third—at least, three of them were in verse—the advertisers evidently being of the firm opinion that mere prose could not do justice to their establishments.

Some of the advertisements were in

big, black type, others were printed in italics, several were illustrated with half-tone or line-cut pictures of pretentious looking hotels and farmhouses.

There was one little advertisement in one of the papers, however, which was a great contrast to all the others because of the modesty of its claims.

It was a plain little six-line notice, which seemed quite out of place among the more pretentious announcements. It read:

Shady Bower Farm, Greene County,
situated in the heart of the Catskill
Mountains, 6,000 feet above sea-level;
bathing, rowing, and fishing free to
guests; good, wholesome food; board,
seven dollars per week.

It was the conservative tone of this announcement which appealed to me most of all.

"No doubt this fellow's place is just as good, if not better, than these others," I said to myself. "It isn't always the man who makes the most noise who has the best wares to offer. The proprietor of Shady Bower Farm is probably too modest and too simple to proclaim the merits of his establishment above a whisper."

That fact spoke well for him, in my opinion. I judged him to be an honest, simple child of Nature, uncontaminated by contact with the guile and hypocrisy of city life, who looked you straight in the eye when he addressed you, and who would rather die than dilute the milk.

There was something about the name of the place, too, which attracted me. "Shady Bower Farm"! It certainly sounded enticing. I could almost smell the new-mown hay and hear the melodious swishing of the tree-branches as they were swept by the keen, invigorating mountain breezes.

And, in addition, the cheapness of the board was an important consideration. Most of the other advertisements quoted prices far above my means.

Seven dollars a week was really very reasonable, especially when rowing, bathing, and boating were thrown in gratis. So I decided upon Shady Bower Farm.

I wrote a letter to the proprietor, asking for further particulars, and stating that I was a young man whose health was somewhat impaired, and who was looking for a nice, quiet, healthy spot in the mountains in which to recuperate.

I received a reply almost immediately. It was written in lead-pencil on ruled paper, and this fact pleased me immensely. It is a pet theory of mine that the character of people can be judged by their correspondence.

Surely, a man who used a pencil instead of pen and ink, and ruled paper instead of a more pretentious letter-head, must be a simple, unsophisticated, all-right sort of fellow, I argued. The favorable mental picture of the proprietor of Shady Bower Farm which I had already formed was heightened by the receipt of this letter.

It read as follows:

DEAR FRIEND:

I got your note and was very glad to hear from you. If you decide to come, I am sure I can make you comfortable and give you a good time.

My farm is really a very beautiful place. Folks do tell me that it is the prettiest spot in all the Catskills. I reckon they are jollying me some; but come and see for yourself. Write me when you expect to arrive, and I will meet the train with my rig.

Yours respectfully,

FARMER HIRAM SNOOKINS.

I liked the way that letter began. "Dear Friend"! How delightfully cordial and unconventional it sounded! Surely, a fellow who hailed you as a friend before he had seen your face would simply exude hospitality when you were actually his guest.

I was cautious, however. I wrote another letter to Farmer Snookins, asking him if he was quite sure that his place was healthy and restful.

In response I got another penciled epistle, as follows:

Healthy! Why, we haven't even got a graveyard around these parts. Five years ago a doctor located ten miles from this place. He thought he was going to make a comfortable living, I reckon. He is now an inmate of our county poorhouse. I mention this to show you that we ain't got no use for a physician around here. We don't even need a horse-doctor. Our live stock never ails. The pure mountain air keeps them healthy.

As for bein' restful, my dear friend, let me assure you that Shady Bower Farm can't be beat in that respect, though I do say it myself.

This is the place where *Rip Van Winkle* fell into his long sleep. It wasn't no magic liquor which caused *Rip* to doze off. It was the restful atmosphere of Meritville, Greene County. I guess I can't say no more. When can I expect you?

This sounded encouraging. As a matter of fact, it sounded just a little too encouraging to suit me.

In accordance with my physician's advice, I was seeking a quiet place; but I didn't want one that was too quiet.

I am young and romantically inclined, and my vacation plans included the summer girl. What was the use of free rowing, bathing, and fishing unless there were pretty girls to row, bathe, and fish with?

Unless Farmer Snookins's place was enlivened by the presence of the summer girl, I decided that, whatever its other natural advantages, Shady Bower Farm was not the place for me.

So I sent him a telegram, inquiring:

Are there any pretty girls stopping with you?

He replied by letter, as follows:

Pretty gals? Say, my dear fellow, I've got a score of them on my farm. The young lady who won the beauty-prize, recently offered by a New York newspaper, is at present one of my boarders. The others run her pretty close, though, when it comes to looks. They're the prettiest lot of gals I've ever seed in all my life. Come and take your pick of them. I've told them that

you're comin', and they're all terribly anxious to meet you.

That settled the matter. I packed my trunk, bought a ticket, wired Farmer Snookins that I was on my way, and boarded a Hudson River boat that very day.

I left the boat at Catskill Landing and took the mountain railroad to Meritville.

The train ride was long, dusty, and uncomfortable; but I comforted myself with pleasant thoughts of Shady Bower Farm, honest, hospitable Farmer Hiram Snookins, and his bevy of pretty girl boarders — especially the young lady who had won the beauty prize awarded by a New York newspaper. I promised myself many delightful hours with this proved possessor of pulchritude.

"All out for Meritville!" shouted the conductor at length. "Change here for Sayo, Hillside, Highbend, Canonbury, and Brookdale!"

Quite a few of us left the train. There were young men, old men, young women, old women, whole families, and single, solitary persons, like myself, who stepped upon the platform.

I noticed a dozen or more farmers' rigs drawn up alongside the little depot. Some of these rigs were quite smart looking, and all of them bore signs denoting their destination.

I scanned these signs eagerly. I read: "Dow's Fruit Farm," "Sherman House," "Swiss Manor," "Hillside Villa," "Hotel Canonbury," etc., on various wagons; but not a sign of any vehicle from Shady Bower Farm could I discover.

My fellow passengers who had alighted with me climbed aboard the waiting wagons, laughing and chattering, and were driven away to their respective destinations.

When the last of them had gone I stood alone upon the deserted platform, gazing mournfully at my trunk and dress-suit case, and began to feel decidedly dejected and uncomfortable.

Farmer Snookins had promised positively to meet the train and transport me and my baggage. His failure to make good at the start did not look very encouraging.

At length I approached a shabby, dirty-looking, bearded man, who stood near a wagon which was even dirtier looking than he was.

I had noticed this wagon before; but the idea that it could be used for the transportation of passengers had not occurred to me. Its appearance indicated that it was there for the purpose of hauling a load of mud or coal or some such cargo.

"I beg your pardon, my friend," I said to the shabby, dirty-faced man, "you haven't seen anything of a rig from Shady Bower Farm, have you?"

"Sure," he replied, eyeing me with surprise. "There it is."

"Good Heavens!" I gasped, seeing that he pointed to the dirty, dilapidated wagon. "Surely, not that—"

"That's Shady Bower Farm's rig," said he, regarding me sternly. "Are you Mr. Mortimer Collingwood, the new boarder?"

"Yes," I stammered, and began to wish myself back in New York.

The discovery that that wretched-looking conveyance and the half-starved, weak-kneed horses attached to it were the property of my prospective host was certainly a great shock, but I quickly rallied.

I thought of the young lady boarder who had won the beauty prize and the score of other pretty girls who were to be found at Shady Bower Farm, and I began to make excuses to myself for the appearance of that rig.

Perhaps it was only a borrowed vehicle, I reflected. Maybe my host's regular conveyance had broken down, and rather than disappoint me he had pressed this outfit into service.

I turned to the man with a sigh of relief.

"Where is Farmer Snookins?" I inquired pleasantly.

"I am Farmer Snookins," he answered, gazing at me defiantly.

This certainly was shock number two. The proprietor of Shady Bower Farm sadly differed from the mental picture I had conceived.

In addition to being dirty, shabby, and unkempt, he wasn't at all in appearance an honest, simple child of Nature.

His face was extremely sinister-looking, his eyes were beady; and, instead of looking you straight in the face, he had a habit of gazing at his large and ill-shod feet.

I am optimistically inclined, however.

"After all," I reflected, "appearances are often deceiving. This fellow may possess a heart of gold, despite his ill-favored countenance."

I held out my hand impulsively.

"Farmer Snookins," I said, "I am very glad to meet you. I hope that our acquaintance will prove mutually pleasant."

"Huh!" he grunted. "Jump in the rig, and we'll be gettin' along. We're late already. Why in thunderation didn't you tell me who you was before? Is this here your trunk?"

I nodded.

"Well, you'd better give me a hand in gettin' it into the wagon, I reckon."

I complied. There was something about Farmer Snookins's demeanor which forced compliance. I began to feel pretty miserable and decidedly uncomfortable. My host's manner was no more prepossessing than his looks.

"I suppose it's just surface gruffness, though," I reassured myself, still optimistic. "The natural gruffness of a son of the soil, I guess."

I climbed aboard the wagon, and Farmer Snookins seated himself beside me and took the reins.

It was a long, tedious ride, and for the most part a painfully silent one.

Mr. Snookins was not much of a conversationalist, it appeared. He rarely spoke unless I addressed myself to him, and then he generally replied in monosyllables.

The man's manner soon began to get on my nerves. There was something almost uncanny about him as he sat beside me, grim and silent.

My spirits began to grow more and more depressed as the ride progressed. To add to my discomfort, the mountain roads we traveled were so rough that I was shaken and rattled until I was on the verge of collapse. If that wagon had any springs at all, they certainly did not serve the purpose for which they were put there.

How I wished now that I had not de-

cided to spend my vacation at Shady Bower Farm. Even the prospect of meeting the bevy of beautiful boarders, including the fortunate winner of the pulchritude prize, could no longer cheer me.

At length, just as I was beginning to believe that the ride would never come to an end, we drew up in front of a dilapidated two-story farmhouse, which in wretchedness of appearance quite matched the wagon and Farmer Snookins.

Night had already descended, but there was not a single light in this gloomy looking building—not even the flicker of a candle in one of the windows.

I turned to my companion fearfully.

"What place is this?" I demanded hoarsely; but I knew intuitively what his answer would be.

"This is Shady Bower Farm," he answered, and he added to the words a chuckle that sounded positively fiendish.

"Get out," he commanded, "and give a hand with the trunk. Don't sit gaping there, young feller. Everybody helps on Shady Bower Farm. We haven't any use for shirkers around here."

"But I didn't come here to work," I protested indignantly.

Of course, I should not have minded helping him with the trunk, for it was obviously too heavy for him to handle alone; but I resented the commanding tone in which he spoke, and I made up my mind that it was high time for us to arrive at an understanding.

"I never heard of a boarding-house where the guests were expected to do the work of a hired man," I went on haughtily. "I do not wish to appear disobliging, Mr. Snookins; but I must positively refuse to be bossed by you."

He shrugged his shoulders, and, pursing his lips, emitted a shrill whistle.

I heard a swishing in the long grass, and suddenly six of the most ferocious boarhounds I had ever seen dashed up to the wagon and began to growl and snarl in a manner which filled me with terror.

"These here dogs belong to me," said Farmer Snookins quietly. "At a word from me they would tear you to pieces."

Now, are you going to give me a hand with that trunk?"

"Send away those dogs, and I'll do anything you say," I gasped, my teeth chattering with fear.

I assisted him in lifting the trunk into the house, the savage-looking dogs encircling us and snapping at me as I did so in a manner that made my blood run cold.

He led the way up a short flight of stairs, and with my help, deposited the trunk in a small front room.

"This is your bedroom," he said. "You can retire now, if you like. I guess you must be tired after your long trip."

"I'm hungry," I told him. "It is several hours since I dined. Aren't you going to give me some supper?"

"We don't serve suppers at Shady Bower Farm," he replied coldly. "If you're up early to-morrow morning, you'll get some breakfast. Good night."

He poked his head in at the door again a few seconds later.

"I forgot to tell you that I let them dogs run around loose at night," he remarked. "They're hungry, and they ain't got any prejudice against human flesh. I merely mention this in case you might be thinking of taking an evening stroll."

With these words he went out again. I flung myself dejectedly on the bed and began to ponder upon the situation.

This was certainly the queerest boarding-house I had ever struck. I was being treated more like a prisoner than a guest.

I made up my mind that I would leave the place the next day.

I went to the window, and, throwing it open, gazed out at the surrounding landscape.

There didn't seem to be another human habitation for miles around—nothing but farmlands and wild mountain country. From beneath my window came the howls of one of the ferocious boarhounds.

"I certainly shall not stay here any longer than to-morrow morning, even if I have to pay a whole week's board in order to get away," I said to myself, with a shudder. "I wonder what kind of people the other boarders are. It is

queer they tolerate such tyrannical treatment."

It suddenly dawned upon me that perhaps there *were* no other boarders. I had not seen nor heard signs of any. My belief in the score of pretty summer girls, of whom Farmer Snookins had boasted in his letter, had vanished by this time.

The proprietor of Shady Bower Farm had deceived me in other respects; so what reason was there for supposing that his alluring letter had told the truth about these beautiful maidens? I was fully convinced now that the young lady who had won the prize for beauty offered by a New York newspaper was nothing more than a myth—a figment of Farmer Snookins's imagination.

"I went to sleep at length; for I was so exhausted from my trip that even my disappointment and my fears could not keep me awake.

I was aroused at about six the following morning by the ringing of a rising-bell.

I dressed hastily, and hurried downstairs, remembering that Farmer Snookins had intimated that I would get no breakfast unless I was early at the table.

I found my way unaided to the dining-room. Farmer Snookins was not there; but a young girl was laying the cloth as I entered the room.

She appeared surprised to see me; and I was joyfully surprised to see her.

She was beautiful enough to be the holder of the pulchritude prize the farmer had mentioned in his letter. She was, without doubt, one of the prettiest girls I had ever beheld, although her face was pale and her eyes looked as if she had been crying.

At sight of her, I began to waver in my determination to leave Shady Bower Farm immediately after breakfast.

"Perhaps this place isn't so bad, after all," I mused. "I might try to stick it out for a day or two, anyway."

"Good morning," I said aloud.

"Good morning," she replied very cordially.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Farmer Snookins's daughter?" I inquired; for, seeing that she was busy laying the table, I assumed that she must be a member of the household.

She shook her head negatively.

"Are you employed here, then?"

Again she shook her head; and, stepping over to my side, she whispered in my ear these startling words:

"I am a prisoner in this place, like yourself."

"What?" I gasped. "You surely can't mean that you—"

"Hush!" she whispered. "For Heaven's sake not so loud, or he will hear us. I came here as a boarder a week ago. I have been here ever since."

"And do you mean to say that he makes you wait at table and do the housework?" I exclaimed indignantly.

She nodded; and her eyes filled with tears.

"Why do you stand for it? Why don't you leave?" I demanded.

"I can't," she replied, with an expression that was pitiful. "I am a prisoner here. I cannot get away. You, too, will find that you—"

She did not finish the sentence; for just then Farmer Snookins entered the room, and took his seat at the head of the table.

"Bring on the breakfast!" he commanded gruffly.

The girl complied with a submissive-ness that made my blood boil.

She brought in three platters of corned beef, some stewed corn, and some bread and butter.

"Sit down, both of you," the farmer commanded us sternly.

The girl seated herself obediently at the table; so did I. There was something about our host's manner which brooked no opposition.

We ate in silence. After we had finished, Farmer Snookins again addressed himself to the girl.

"Go into the kitchen," he commanded, "and shell the peas for dinner. When you get through with them, you can darn my socks."

If she had been under a hypnotic spell, she could not have obeyed him more meekly.

After she had left the room, he turned to me.

"What do you do for a living?" he inquired.

"I am an artist," I replied.

"A painter, you mean?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Your talent will come in handy. My barn needs painting. That will keep you employed for the balance of the day, I reckon."

"But I am not that kind of a painter," I protested. "I paint pictures."

"My barn is a picture," he replied grimly. "Don't argue with me, young man. You'd better get busy right away."

"Now, see here," I exclaimed, summoning all my courage, "we might as well have an understanding right now, Mr. Hiram Snookins. I did not come here to work. As I told you in my letter, I came here for rest and quiet. I am paying you board, and I don't intend to be treated like a hired man. I won't stand for it, in fact."

"Is that so?" he replied, without the slightest trace of emotion.

He went to the window and whistled.

The six ferocious-looking boarhounds came bounding over the window-sill. They looked even more powerful and savage by daylight than they had appeared in the dusk of the preceding evening.

They crouched obediently at his feet, the foam dropping from their cruel, distended jaws, a wicked light in their bloodshot eyes.

"Going to paint that barn?" he inquired laconically.

"Of course I am," I answered hastily.

"I was only joking when I refused just now. If there is anything I enjoy it is painting barns. Where shall I find paint-pot and brush?"

"In the barn," he answered. "See that you make a good job of it, or you'll have to do it all over again. I don't like sloppy work. You'll find a ladder there, too. Get along now."

"By the way, Mr. Snookins," I said timidly, "I am sorry to have to inform you that I shall have to leave you this evening. I have some important business to transact in New York. Of course, I shall return here—when that business has been attended to."

I looked at him eagerly as I said those words. Would he fall for this none too subtle ruse, I wondered uneasily?

"You will leave here when I get good and ready to let you go," he answered gruffly. "I guess that important busi-

ness transaction in New York will have to wait for a few weeks, my friend. Go along to your work now."

I walked toward the barn slowly and sadly. My brain was in a whirl. My heart was as heavy as lead.

Could this be the twentieth century, and New York State? Was it really possible that this fellow could keep me here and make me do his bidding against my will?

It certainly looked as if it were possible; for, absurd as it seemed, here was I actually getting the ladder and paint-pot out of the barn, and starting in to do the work of a house-painter—I, who possessed the soul of an artist, and who had come to this place on a physician's instructions to take a short, perfect rest.

And yet, what else could I do? To make sure that I did not loaf, Farmer Snookins sent one of his boarhounds to watch me.

The brute squatted on his haunches at the foot of the ladder, and growled so ominously every time I ceased slinging paint, that I worked more industriously than I had ever worked in my life.

At noon my tyrannical host came to summon me to dinner.

The meal consisted of cold roast meat, green peas, and potatoes. The girl laid the table, and then joined us, as she had done at breakfast. I again noticed how beautiful she was; and the sad, despairing look on her pale face filled me with a determination to find some means of rescuing her and myself from our extraordinary captivity.

After we had finished eating, Farmer Snookins announced that he intended to make another trip to the railroad-station that afternoon to bring back some more guests who had succumbed to the lure of his advertisement in the newspaper.

My heart beat joyously at his words. I fancied I saw a chance to escape from this place while our captor was away.

I glanced across the table at the girl, thinking that she also must perceive this opportunity; but, to my surprise, there was not the slightest trace of hope on her face.

"I wonder why she did not try to get away yesterday while Farmer Snookins was at the depot bringing me here?" I asked myself.

As though in answer to my unuttered thought, our tyrannical host spoke again:

"I guess I'll have to lock you up in the barn while I'm away," he said. "You'd better not try to get out neither, for them dogs will be outside waitin' for you. They'll be extra hungry, and savage, too. I haven't given them anything to eat this morning, so as to be sure that their appetites will be good."

He grinned at the look of discomfiture which I could not repress. I understood now why the girl had made no effort to escape during the absence of our captor on the preceding day.

True to his word, after Farmer Snookins had harnessed up the pair of wretched-looking horses to the dirty, dilapidated wagon, he put us inside the barn, and locked the door on the outside with a padlock. Then he ordered his six boarhounds to stand guard outside, and drove off, confident that we could not get away.

After he had gone, I looked at the girl, and the girl looked at me. Despair was written on our faces.

"This is a pretty state of affairs," I groaned.

"It is terrible," she replied, with a sob.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have actually been kept a prisoner here for a week?" I inquired.

"Yes. And I fear I shall remain here for the rest of my life," she sobbed. "There doesn't seem to be any chance of getting out of the clutches of this odious wretch."

"How did you come to select this place?" I asked.

"I was attracted by his advertisement in the paper—the same as you were, I suppose," she answered. "I am a New York school-teacher, and I was looking for a nice, quiet place in which to spend a few weeks of my vacation."

"According to the advertisement, Shady Bower Farm seemed to be just the kind of place I sought; and, in addition, the board was very cheap. I wrote for further particulars, and received such a nice, cordial letter in reply that I packed my trunks and came up here immediately. That wretch can certainly write nice letters."

"Yes, I know—confound him," I groaned. "It was his letters that lured me here, too. What is his game, anyway? Why does he act in this extraordinary fashion? He must be crazy."

"Of course he's crazy," replied the girl. "Haven't you noticed the mad glint in his eyes. He is violently insane. Do you know what he calls this place?"

"Shady Bower Farm, I believe he has named it."

"Oh, that's what he calls it in the advertisement; but he's got another name for it. He calls it 'The Asylum for the Sane.' He told me the other day, with a fiendish chuckle, that there are so many institutions for insane people that he deemed it high time that the sane folks had an asylum, too. That's why he keeps us here."

"How terrible!" I gasped. "Do you mean to say that you haven't had a single chance to get away in the past seven days?"

"How could I? Those terrible dogs are running around loose all the time, day and night. They would tear me to pieces at the first opportunity. And, besides, he goes about armed. He's a regular walking arsenal. He carries a loaded revolver in every pocket; and he told me the first day I got here that he would fill me full of lead if I attempted to escape."

"Horrors!" I ejaculated. "But nevertheless we must find some way to escape. We must match our wits against his cunning."

"I wish we could," she sighed. "I am afraid, though, that our wits would avail us little against the teeth of those terrible dogs."

"Haven't you had an opportunity to communicate with people on the outside?" I inquired, with a shudder. "Surely you must have been able to get word to somebody."

"No. He's too clever to permit that," was her discouraging reply. "He won't allow us to get within speaking distance of anybody. That's why he locks us up in here when he goes to the railway-depot."

"Well, don't your friends know that you are here? Didn't you leave them your address when you came?" I asked,

with a sudden ray of hope. "If so, they will soon become alarmed at not hearing from you, and will come here to investigate."

"No, they won't," she answered sadly. "Even though that farmer is insane, he is very shrewd. He doesn't overlook a single detail. I have received several letters from my friends since I have been here."

"He reads them all; and he forced me to answer them. He makes me send them pretty souvenir postals, telling them what a fine place this is, and that I am having a perfectly delightful time. I am obliged to write as he dictates—otherwise, he threatens to set his dogs on me. I fully believe that he would do it, too."

"Good Heavens! How terrible!" I gasped. "I can see now that we are going to have a hard job getting out of this madman's clutches—but I am going to find a way," I added, with as much confidence as I could summon under the circumstances.

"Oh, it is brave of you to talk so hopefully," she declared, regarding me admiringly. "It gives me courage to hear you. I am so glad that you are here. It makes this terrible situation so much easier to bear."

I myself did not feel particularly glad that I was there; but I delicately refrained from telling her so.

"By the way," I remarked, "we might as well introduce ourselves to each other. My name is Mortimer Collingwood. Would you mind telling me yours?"

"Janet Meredith," she answered.

"It is a pretty name," I declared. "I am delighted to meet you, Miss Meredith—even under these most distressing circumstances."

It was evening before Farmer Snookins returned and released us from the barn.

He brought with him a nice-looking young couple.

"Poor things," I whispered to Miss Meredith, regarding the newcomers with sympathy.

The young man appeared to be much worried. His wife was on the verge of tears. I could see at a glance that Farmer Snookins had already begun to

impress his new guests with his startling idiosyncrasies.

We made their acquaintance on the front porch. The young man took advantage of an opportunity to take me aside and whisper in my ear.

"Say, old man," he said anxiously, "what kind of a ranch is this, anyway? I don't believe I like the fellow who runs it at all."

"You'll like him still less when you've been here a few days," I retorted grimly.

"I don't intend to stay here a few days," he answered with a frown. "My wife and I are on our honeymoon. We can't afford anything very swell; and when we saw his advertisement we thought it would suit us perfectly."

"We intended to stay here for three weeks; but that farmer's manner doesn't suit me at all. He's already got my wife frightened almost out of her wits. We've got to stay over night, I guess. It is too late to find another boarding-house; but we shall certainly leave the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Maybe you'll stay here longer than you think," I said gently.

"Oh, no, we won't," he answered innocently. "I don't like the looks of the place at all—and, besides, there are mosquitoes here. One bit me on the nose just now. My wife and I can't stand mosquitoes. We shall leave right after breakfast to-morrow morning."

I did not have the heart to impart to him the cruel truth. He would find it out soon enough, I reflected.

"Come here and give me a hand lifting this trunk up to your room," Farmer Snookins commanded him sternly.

"Do nothing of the sort, Percival," exclaimed the young man's bride indignantly. "The idea of his asking such a thing of you! We did not come here to work. If he needs help with the trunk, let him get one of the farm-hands."

Farmer Snookins did not make any answer to this mutinous outburst. He merely pursed his lips, and gave vent to a shrill whistle.

I knew from bitter experience what that meant. The six ferocious boar-hounds came bounding onto the porch. They encircled the young couple with savage growls.

"Now," said the farmer, "are you going to give me a hand, or are you not?"

The young man assisted him in lifting the trunk up-stairs. It cannot be truthfully said that he did so cheerfully; but he certainly went about the task with plenty of alacrity.

The newly wed couple did not carry out their intention of leaving Shady Bower Farm next morning for a more congenial place. Very much against their wills, of course, they started in to spend their honeymoon by doing chores for Farmer Snookins.

The young husband chopped wood, and made himself generally useful; his bride assisted Miss Meredith with the kitchen work.

"It's a darned outrage," the young man confided to me, when we had a chance to exchange a few words without being overheard. "It doesn't seem possible that such a state of affairs could exist in these days; and less than a hundred miles from New York City. We really ought not to submit to it. We ought to stand together, and assert our independence."

"Perhaps we ought," I replied, "but I don't think those dogs would receive a declaration of independence from us very graciously. I guess you'd better keep on chopping wood, and say nothing for the present."

The young husband volunteered the suggestion that it would be a good idea to poison the dogs.

We all heartily agreed with him that it would be an excellent idea; but we were sadly handicapped in its execution by the lamentable fact that we were quite unable to procure the necessary poison.

I proposed making an attempt to get away while the dogs were asleep; but Miss Meredith assured us that the brutes never slept with more than one eye closed; and, besides, as she pointed out, Farmer Snookins always locked all the doors at night and took away the keys.

During the day the dogs never let us out of their sight.

I was a prisoner for a whole week before I hit upon what really seemed like a feasible plan of effecting our escape.

I mentioned it to Miss Meredith, when we had an opportunity to exchange a few words alone.

"I've got an idea," I announced.

"Is it a good one?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, I think it will work. Listen, and I'll explain it to you. You've heard, of course, of shipwrecked mariners, stranded on desert islands, getting news of their predicament to the outside world by enclosing messages in glass bottles which they cast into the sea?"

"Yes," she assented eagerly.

"Well, I intend to follow their example," I went on. "I have managed to get hold of a small glass bottle."

"But I don't see how that could be done," she exclaimed. "We haven't any sea to throw a bottle into; and bottles won't float on land, you know. If you threw it on the ground, nobody would be likely to discover it."

"I don't intend to throw it on the ground," I answered. "Look, Miss Meredith. Do you see that little brook there?"

I pointed to a tiny stream which ran past the rear of Shady Bower Farm.

"That stream must wend its way to some creek or river around here," I went on excitedly. "I was studying it this morning. Luckily for us, it has been swollen by recent rains; and, small though it is, it ought to have enough current to carry away a small bottle. I am going to put a message in a little glass bottle, and throw it into the brook. If we are lucky, it will be carried out into deeper water and finally to the river, and somebody will pick it up and hurry to our rescue."

"Oh, how very clever of you!" she exclaimed, clapping her little hands. "I do hope that you will succeed! If you get me out of this horrid place, I shall never forget you, Mr. Collingwood."

These words made me more than ever determined not to fail.

I wrote on a piece of paper, with my fountain pen, the following stirring message:

Help! Help! Help! Whoever reads this, get men and guns and hasten to Shady Bower Farm, Meritville, Greene County. We are kept prisoners here by

Farmer Snookins, who has gone insane. There are nine of us, and we have been imprisoned here for weeks. Don't fail to come well armed, for Farmer Snookins is armed to the teeth, and he has six savage boarhounds. For Heaven's sake don't fail us in our hour of need, or our blood will be on your head. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Help! Help! Help!

"I guess that is strong enough," I remarked, eying my work with satisfaction. I rolled the paper tightly, and placed it inside a small bottle which had contained toothwash. Then I jammed the cork in so snugly that the bottle was thoroughly water-tight, and threw it into the brook.

Miss Janet Meredith and I observed with much satisfaction that there was just enough current to the tiny stream to carry the bottle away.

We watched that improvised bearer of our forlorn hope until it drifted out of sight. Then we both sighed, and walked slowly away.

"I do hope that somebody finds it and reads that message," Miss Meredith remarked fervently.

My emotion was too great to permit of words. I squeezed her little hand sympathetically, and noticed with delight that she did not appear to resent it.

All that day we wondered and worried. Every time our eyes met, each could see that that little bottle and its precious contents were uppermost in the other's thoughts.

We said nothing to our fellow prisoners about what we had done. Of course, if my plan was successful, we would all benefit by it; but there was no use in taking them into our confidence at present.

That evening Farmer Snookins summoned us all into the barn.

There was something about his manner which filled me with terror. His eyes were bloodshot and rolling. His mouth worked spasmodically. His countenance, ordinarily sinister, now looked positively fiendish.

When we were all assembled before him, he stood there regarding us with a leer of triumph, rubbed his palms together in a satisfied way, and gave vent to several chuckles, the sound of which made my blood run cold.

I knew that something unusual was about to happen; but I did not guess the awful fate that fiend in human form had mapped out for us.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, in a rasping voice, "I have assembled you here in order to give you a great treat. My asylum for the sane has been an immense success. I am very well pleased with the way my original idea has worked. My experiment has given me great pleasure; but, nevertheless, I have decided that it is time to bring it to an end."

Each of us heaved a heartfelt sigh of relief. We thought that he was about to announce we could have our freedom.

"I have decided to bring my experiment to an end by a great and thrilling spectacle," he went on, chuckling at the hopeful look on our faces.

"I once read in a book that in ancient times slaves were thrown into the arena along with wild beasts. This barn will make an excellent arena, and those pet dogs of mine are certainly wild beasts. I haven't given them a morsel of food this day, in order that their appetites should be thoroughly whetted."

We understood him now, and looked at each other in horror and despair.

"Good Heavens," I gasped. "You don't mean to say that you are really going to be inhuman enough to set those dogs on us?"

He laughed sardonically.

"I reckon you've got my idea exactly, friend," he chuckled. "In three minutes I shall whistle for my faithful pets, and then the fun will begin."

He again rubbed the palms of his hands together. I looked into that cruel face, and foresaw that we were all doomed; but, nevertheless, I tried to plead with him.

"Have mercy," I begged. "Give us a little more time. Or, if you must kill us, shoot us down. Don't let those terrible dogs tear us to pieces. Have a little pity."

"No, no," he replied, laughing loud and shaking his head. "It wouldn't be half as much fun to shoot you down. I've thought of that, but it would all be over too quick. The dogs will furnish a much more thrilling spectacle. It's going to be the dogs.

"And the three minutes are up, too," he added. "The festive hour has arrived. Slaves, prepare to defend yourselves, if you can, for here come the wild beasts to devour you."

He pursed his lips, and was about to give vent to the whistle, which meant our doom.

But just then we heard wild howls of fury, followed by the sharp reports of firearms and the shouting of many men.

Before Farmer Snookins could turn, a burly man had entered the barn, and brought the stock of a rifle crashing down upon his head.

The burly man was followed by several others. We turned to our deliverers with exclamations of gratitude and joy.

"Thank goodness we were in time," said the burly man, kneeling and tying the prostrate farmer's hands and feet with ropes. "I am the sheriff of the county, ladies and gentlemen. The note you sent in the bottle was picked up in the creek by a feller in a naphtha launch, and handed to me.

"I didn't know whether it was a hoax or not, but I decided to act at once. I got my posse together, and we came here as quick as we could.

"I've been sort of suspicious of this feller Snookins for some time past. Every time I've met him on the road I've fancied he looked and acted sort of queer.

"He ain't been exactly right, I guess, since his wife and daughter were drowned, a year ago. I didn't suppose, though, that he was really violently insane. I figured out that he was harmless."

"Well, he wasn't harmless, I assure you," I declared grimly. "If you had arrived one second later you would have found our mangled bodies. He was just about to order those terrible dogs of his to tear us limb from limb, when you and your men gallantly intervened. By the way, what have you done with those dogs?"

"Shot 'em all dead," he answered, with a grunt of satisfaction. "Thanks to the warning contained in that bottle, we came here fully prepared to handle them brutes. They attacked us, but we were too quick for them. Each and every one of them has a bullet through his head."

My breast expanded with a heartfelt sigh of relief.

"I guess you are all free to depart now, ladies and gentlemen, whenever you are ready," announced the sheriff, with a pleasant smile. "I reckon you won't want to hang around Shady Bower Farm after the experience you have had."

"I reckon not," I replied. "I am awfully glad that my bottle plan worked so well. Aren't you, Miss Meredith?"

But instead of answering my question

the beautiful girl suddenly reeled and fell fainting into my arms.

Of course it was an unconscious act on her part, but her hands were certainly clasped around my neck when she opened her eyes.

"After all, this harrowing experience possessed some compensating advantages," I remarked to the sheriff.

"So I perceive," he replied, with a laugh. "Don't forget to send me an invitation, young feller."

A Cold Day For the Georgia Man.

By GEORGE MARIANO.

Not much trouble in getting this overcoat
at a bargain, but lots of it afterward.

"WANTER good overcoat, cheap as dirt?"

Walter Babbit looked as though he needed several things besides an overcoat. The store-clothes he had bought before leaving Simpson Corners were decidedly not of the smart cut worn by the young men he saw in the places where he applied for work. Then, three weeks' tramping had caused their appearance to deteriorate sadly.

His shoes had literally gone to pieces. His derby hat had come to grief in a rush at a Subway station, and positively refused to give up one or two dents.

But the one need that impressed itself most deeply upon him this cold evening was that of an overcoat. All day he had wandered about searching for employment, and shivering. The cheap meals had brought him to his last ten-dollar bill, but had failed to warm him.

He was not used to New York's December weather. For Simpson Corners is in Georgia, as any map big enough to mark a village of four hundred inhabitants will show you. And December in Georgia is different from December in New York.

For the past week Walter Babbit had eyed every window of the cheap tailor-shops he passed. He had read every price-tag looking for one that should come inside the five-dollar mark.

For he had made up his mind that five

dollars was his limit for an overcoat. He had just seen one at four-ninety-five that he would have turned up his nose at a week ago. But to-day was colder than any of the other days.

He was just about to enter the little shop when the stranger accosted him with the question that showed the mental insight of a mind-reader.

Babbit turned around and looked in wonder at the possessor of such occult powers.

The stranger was a short, thick-set young man about Babbit's own age. He wore a rather shabby outer garment with its collar turned up at the neck. His hat was drawn over his eyes, which were a trifle shifty.

The lad from Georgia could not help feeling a bit suspicious, but any proposition offering a good overcoat cheap was interesting.

"Come along and I'll show you a real bargain," the man urged, and Babbit started off with him.

They went through some side streets; and, but for the fact that they were all fairly well lighted, the country youth would have felt a little nervous. He had a sort of feeling that he was being led by a very roundabout course to reach a near-by place.

He was quite sure that he walked three or four blocks north after going some blocks south. When, at last, they pulled

up before an unpretentious apartment-house, Babbit was uncomfortably admitting to himself that he had lost his bearings.

They climbed three or four flights of stairs, and the man finally paused and produced a key from one of his pockets. With this he admitted himself and Babbit to a rear suite of rooms.

Inside everything was a confusion of unsorted objects. Several sets of fine silver lay heaped upon the floor. Small bits of *bric-à-brac* were scattered about. Various pieces of women's wearing apparel, especially furs, were piled in a corner. In another corner were a number of boxes of cigars.

Against one wall was stacked a heap of unbroken bolts of cloth. A rich piece of tapestry had been thrown in another corner. Three or four gold watches and a couple of fancy little clocks gave out the impression that time was carefully measured here.

There was not a chair or table or any other piece of furniture in the room. Neither was there a window or door save the one by which they had entered. Walter Babbit noted the strangeness of it all, and accepted the stranger's explanation that he had just moved into the flat and had no time to put things in order.

"Here's the coat," the man finally announced triumphantly, after he had rummaged the pile of women's apparel. "What'll you gimme for it?"

Babbit looked at the garment in amazement. It was such a coat as he had never hoped to possess.

Its inner lining was of most beautiful fur. The outside was of a soft, black, genteel-looking material, the name of which was beyond the Southerner's knowledge of cloths.

Sorrowfully he shook his head.

"I couldn't even make an offer on a coat like that," he faltered.

The stranger fairly beamed upon the splendid garment.

"I know you couldn't, young feller. That coat is worth about five hundred dollars. It wouldn't be for sale, either, if—if my poor brother hadn't died last week. I ain't got the heart to wear it. I'd give it to you if I wasn't so blamed hard up. Come on, make an offer."

Babbit smiled deprecatingly.

"I've only got ten dollars to my name," he ventured.

"Well," the other replied, "I'll let you have it fer that. You're needin' a coat pretty bad, an' I'm glad of the chanc't to help yer."

The Georgian was on the point of giving up his last dollar for the splendid bargain. Then he remembered that an overcoat was not the only thing he needed.

His room in the cheap boarding-house was paid for three days more. But his meals were not included in that.

He had tried for two weeks to get work and failed. It might be two weeks more before anything would show up. No, he could not spare all his money.

"I couldn't give the ten," he sighed. "I'm looking for work, and I have to keep something for my meals. I don't care to spend more than five dollars for an overcoat just now."

"Make it seven-fifty and split the diff," the man haggled.

The bargain ended in Babbit's paying six dollars for the coat. He put it on and slipped the change into a pocket.

The man generously offered to pilot him back to the place he had come from. The Southerner thanked him and said he would prefer now to be put on his way to his lodgings on Eighth Avenue.

He was led about by more side streets before his benefactor informed him that this was Eighth Avenue, and that he was but ten blocks from home. Then the stranger, with a curt, "So long," disappeared around a corner.

Walter Babbit had walked twenty or thirty blocks in either direction on Eighth Avenue in the course of his search for a room and, later, in his less successful hunt for employment. He thought he was fairly familiar with certain landmarks. And he felt quite sure now that those landmarks were wanting.

He glanced at the gilt number on the nearest door. It was 1569. The number of his lodging-house was 312.

He walked south half a block to the corner, and glanced up to see the number of the street. It was Fifty-Seventh. His room was near the corner of Twelfth. Then he noticed the name of the street upon which he was walking. It was Madison Avenue.

He walked another block and read the next sign. He was still on Madison Avenue.

"This is queer," he muttered. "I suppose that fellow thought it was a joke to put a green man so far out of his way. Oh, well, I'm not so cold but what I can stand a good walk now."

The streets through which he had passed with the stranger had been quite deserted. As Babbit walked along the more crowded avenue he became aware that people were looking at him curiously. It dawned upon him that the overcoat was just a trifle out of keeping with the rest of his garments.

"Wonder what they think I am?" he thought, without worrying particularly.

The warmth was so welcome that the mere matter of people's opinion did not weigh with him.

Hardly had he thought out this question when it was answered by one of a gay crowd of young people who crossed the avenue directly in front of him. One of them pointed him out and exclaimed: "Pipe mine new/overcoat, Jakey!" in mocking tones.

"Wonder where he stole it!" put in a feminine voice.

It was fortunate that the voice was feminine. Babbit's hot Southern blood went to his forehead in a way that would have been dangerous for any man who had thus spoken.

But as the late purchaser of the overcoat walked on, and his wrath cooled, a lot of his satisfaction over his bargain waned. The suggestion that he had stolen the garment reminded him of thieves in general. Somehow this connected in his mind with the strange room in which he had made his purchase.

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of a well-lighted block and exclaimed: "By George, I'll wager it was a stolen coat!"

He stood there, wondering what he should do. For his life he could not retrace his steps to the unpretentious apartment-house. He had no more idea where it was than he would have had if the house had been located on the moon.

His perturbation was increased as three or four more passers-by stared at his incongruous combination of raiment.

He started again on his way, without any elasticity in his step. His gait was

slow. He suddenly felt very tired and hungry. He stopped once more and looked longingly inside the windows of an almost empty restaurant he was passing.

A man at the table nearest the window suddenly glanced up. There was a momentary look of compassion in his eye, then a slight smile of amusement, which, in turn, gave place to marked astonishment, mingled with wrath. The man interested Babbit almost as much as Babbit seemed to interest him.

For an instant he seemed to be puzzling out some line of action. Then, slowly and easily, he arose from the table, handed a bill to the waiter, who hurried forward with a rather unusually light overcoat for the season, and came out.

Babbit was sufficiently interested in him to notice that he eyed the overcoat very keenly as he passed, and that his steps quickened after he had walked a dozen paces.

He had just turned from staring after this stranger when a rather flashily dressed youth made a sudden dash at him from the opposite side of the street.

"Come here, you," this young man snapped indignantly. "What in the devil are you doing with my overcoat?"

Again the angry flush came to Babbit's face. But he did not splutter or offer fight.

"This is not your overcoat. I just bought it," he tried to say calmly.

"You did, did you? I'll see about that when a policeman comes along. Here, let me have a look at the inside pocket."

Babbit felt a sudden freezing around his heart. Without a murmur he opened the coat and let the young man examine the white cloth sewed inside the pocket.

"Now," the other sneered triumphantly, "perhaps you can explain why your tailor has put my name on this tag?"

Babbit looked in terror at the indelible writing. "James B. Moore" was very distinct. More writing followed, presumably an address.

"Well, young fellow, I won't give you up to the police. You look as though you were up against it enough to be strongly tempted. Just let me have my coat, and I'll keep mum."

The flashily dressed youth led the way toward a partially shadowed spot at the

foot of an imposing front stoop. The Southerner felt grateful for this. It was less humiliating to have to give up his finery where the light was not so glaring. He even murmured, "Thank you," as the young man walked away with the garment drawn over the one he already wore.

Then, as he still stood and tried to grasp the situation, it dawned upon him that he had put his last four dollars in the inside pocket of that overcoat. He started to run after the young man who had been so generous as not to prosecute him. He did not run far.

"That's the man!" an excited voice exclaimed, as a big policeman grabbed Babbit's wrist. "But he's—he's taken off my coat."

"Where'd you put it?" the officer growled, giving the wrist a wrench that caused all its owner's fingers to ache.

Babbit was so astonished that he could not speak for a few seconds. His jaw dropped, and refused to close for the enunciation of words.

"Come on, now—be quick! Where's that coat?" The officer emphasized the question with another twist of the wrist that brought a groan from Babbit's lips. It also brought back his power of speech.

"Why—why," he stammered, "I gave it back to Mr. Moore."

The excited man, whom Babbit now recognized as the one who had showed so much interest from the window of the restaurant, looked angrier and more excited than ever. The policeman nearly broke the Southerner's arm.

"None of that, bo," he cried. "You tell us quick where your pal went with that coat, or we'll know why."

"I—I don't know where he went. I—I was just starting after him."

"Well, how in Tophet could you start after him if you don't know where he went?" the policeman sneered.

"He went that way," and Babbit pointed. "I don't know where."

"Humph!" grunted the officer. "We'll just take him to the station, Mr. Moore. I guess we'll get somethin' outter him there. Will you come along to make the charge?"

"I certainly will," the man replied.

With another wrench on the wrist the officer slipped a shining band over that

bruised member. Babbit was too frightened to talk. Only one idea seemed to possess his mind. He was being arrested—taken to jail like a thief; he was accused of robbery, and he did not see how he could ever prove that he was not guilty.

And this was the end of the fortune he had expected to make in the country's metropolis.

His meditation ended as he was jerked up before the sergeant's desk in the police-station.

"Got this one almost with the goods on," the policeman announced as he saluted his superior. "It's one of the gang that has been workin' Harlem. This here gentleman saw him standin' in front of the St. Jarvis with his overcoat on. It was taken three nights ago."

"Where's the coat?" the sergeant inquired.

"That's where the young devil got the best of us. He shifted it to a pal while Mr. Moore came after me."

"Humph!" and the sergeant looked puzzled. He had once been on the plain-clothes service, and had an interest in details. "Looks as though he'd been expecting to get caught. Are you sure, Mr. Moore, this is the man you saw?"

"Sure? Of course, I'm sure. Why, if I didn't remember his face, I couldn't help noticing that hat when it was on top of a two-hundred-dollar overcoat."

Mr. Moore was honestly indignant that his identification should be questioned.

"Well, let's have your pedigree, you young rascal! What's your name?"

"Walter Babbit," the Southerner answered in choking tones.

He wished he could think of some other name wherewith to keep his own family from the disgrace, but he couldn't do so on the spur of the moment.

"Age?"

"Twenty-two."

"Where do you live?"

"Simpson Corners, Georgia," Babbit began; then corrected himself: "That is, I lived there till I came here to look for a position."

"What kind of position were you looking for?" the sergeant grinned.

"I studied bookkeeping at the Atlanta Business College."

"Ah!" and the sergeant smiled still more. "Looking for a position of trust in some bank or business house?"

Babbit mistook the significance of the smile and answered, "Yes, sir."

"And thought you would practise on a few second-story windows till you could get at a safe easily?"

"Wh—what?"

"Oh, cut out this bluffing," the official growled impatiently. "If you want to tell now where your pals are, all right. If not, we'll get that out of you later."

"I don't know where I got the coat. I'm not familiar enough with the city. I couldn't tell where they took me," Babbit pleaded.

"Take him to the pen. I'll be in there in a minute." The sergeant nodded significantly, and the policeman who had arrested him started to obey.

"Wait a moment, sergeant."

It was the complainant who now interrupted. He had seemed to be interested in Babbit's face from the moment they had entered the room.

"I don't like to go without hearing the fellow's story before I make the complaint," he added.

"Well, come on with your yarn. Make it short," the sergeant snapped at Babbit.

That young man then began and rehearsed the whole course of events since he had been offered a bargain in overcoats that evening. In fact, he went further back under the inspiration of questions from Mr. Moore and the sergeant, and told something of his hardships in town since his arrival.

"But where, was this house?" the sergeant asked again as Babbit finished.

"I don't know where they took me. I haven't the slightest idea."

"You see, Mr. Moore, it's no use. It's hardly likely that he could be taken to a house and brought back without knowing where he went. New York is a little better laid out than that. We'll get more out of him between now and morning."

The man behind the desk saw that his words were taking good effect.

"I'll be around to make the charge," Mr. Moore promised.

The clang of the patrol-wagon sound-

ed outside, and there was a hurried scuffling of feet at the door.

"Take him in," the sergeant commanded, eager to get the one case out of the way before the newcomers should be presented.

He lowered his eyes to the blotter as Babbit was being led to the pen. The crowd from a gambling-house raid were being led into the room.

"Just one moment," the official called after Babbit and his leader. "Where, did you say, is your present residence?"

The prisoner turned about to reply. As he swung around, his eyes passed over the bunch of "material witnesses" the raiders had secured from the gambling-den.

Then his mouth opened in wonder. He forgot to reply to the question that had been asked. In the group was a young man whose rich, fur-lined overcoat was opened to reveal the flashy clothes within.

"That's the man I gave the coat to!" Babbit exclaimed.

"That looks like my coat," Mr. Moore seconded.

The youth made a quick dodge to get away. Being arrested as a witness against a gambling-house was not serious. He had not minded that. But the overcoat proposition was different.

He was stopped, however, by a quick policeman at the door of the station-house.

"Well, say, Slick Jim, I guess you overstepped the mark getting that coat back again," the sergeant snapped at the new prisoner. "Perhaps you can help clear up this mystery?"

Slick Jim helped. Mr. Moore soon had his overcoat once more. The search of its pockets, however, failed to reveal the four dollars of Walter Babbit.

"Lost them on the wheel," Slick Jim admitted boldly.

Babbit realized that he must go out once more into the cold coatless—and this time penniless as well. He almost wished for the warm shelter of the station-house rather than the journey to lower Eighth Avenue.

"Just a moment, Mr. Babbit." Mr. Moore stopped him at the outer door of the station. "I had offered twenty-five

dollars reward for the recovery of that coat. I didn't mention it inside for fear the policeman would claim it."

He held out two yellow bills and one green one. Then he paused as though about to say something more.

"Look here, young man," he began again. "Have you got any letters of reference from—say, the business college in Atlanta? I rather like your face, if that isn't too much to say to it."

For the first time in three weeks Babbit took his letter from the head of the Atlanta Business College out of its envelope before being told that the person he wanted to show it to had not time to read it.

It was a good letter. He had felt that it would be sure to land him somewhere. It showed that he had held the highest marks in all classes throughout the course of study.

Mr. Moore read it through silently and handed it back. He looked Babbit over with a look of disapproval in his eyes.

"Pretty hard on clothes, aren't you?" he asked.

Babbit felt his heart sinking and stammered, "Yes, sir," like a schoolboy caught in some glaring and interdicted naughtiness.

"Still, I guess I want you. Here, I'll give you a week's salary in advance. I know I can trust you, but I couldn't have any one in my office who didn't look a bit better dressed than you do. And here's my place of business. Please be there at eight-thirty to-morrow morning. Get yourself some new clothes in the meanwhile. Good night, and avoid further trouble."

And before the astonished young man could more than say "Thank you," Mr. Moore was sprinting after an up-town car.

Babbit looked through half-tearful eyes at two more yellow bills and one more green one. Then he hunted for a shop where he could buy a less expensive overcoat at not quite so good a bargain.

THE HERO.

WHAT makes a hero?—not success, not fame,
Inebriate merchants, and the loud acclaim
Of gluttoned Avarice—caps tossed up in air,
Or pen of journalist with flourish fair;
Bells pealed, stars, ribbons, and a titular name—
These, though his rightful tribute, he can spare;
His rightful tribute, not his end or aim,
Or true reward; for never yet did these
Refresh the soul, or set the heart at ease.
What makes a hero? An heroic mind.
Expressed in action, in endurance proved.
And if there be preeminence of right,
Derived through pain well suffered, to the height
Of rank heroic, 'tis to bear unmoved,
Not toil, not risk, not rage of sea or wind,
Not the brute fury of barbarians blind,
But worse—ingratitude and poisonous darts,
Launched by the country he has served and loved:
This, with a free, unclouded spirit pure;
This, in the strength of silence to endure,
A dignity to noble deeds imparts
Beyond the gauds and trappings of renown;
This is the hero's complement and crown;
This missed, one struggle has been wanting still,
One glorious triumph of the heroic will,
One self-approval in his heart of hearts.

Sir Henry Taylor.

A HAND-BAG TOO MANY.

By ROBERT KBENE.

Wherein is set forth the awful predicament of a good lady with a bad memory, in the shopping district.

"I BEG your pardon, madam — you dropped your bag!"

Miss Hutchison turned in the narrow, crowded aisle of the department-store. Facing her stood an alert-eyed young man, hat in hand, holding out to her a plain, black-leather shopping-case.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the little, white-haired lady, staring at the familiar-appearing *chatelaine* he proffered. "Why," raising her empty hands and clapping them hastily to her belt—"why, so I did!"

The young man pressed the bag into her clasp.

"I picked it up from the floor behind you," he explained briefly, turning away. "Not at all," he called over his shoulder in answer to her half-uttered speech of thanks; "you're quite welcome!"

Then, stepping back into the crowd around them, he wheeled down another aisle, and disappeared.

"Well!" Miss Hutchison stood flusteredly looking after his departing figure. Her eyes dropped to the shopping-case in her hands. "Well, I'm very fortunate, I'm sure, to get back my bag!"

"And very stupid," she added, "to drop it."

Lifting her gaze to glance swiftly about her, she thankfully perceived that no one watched the embarrassment she felt at the exposure of her carelessness.

No one—that is, save a heavily mustached man in a brown derby hat, standing beside the opposite counter. He turned at the moment that she looked in his direction, his eyes sweeping her from head to foot in a slow stare, and then walked indifferently away.

Blushing slightly, Miss Hutchison moved forward with the stream of shoppers flowing down the aisle.

"I can't understand my carelessness in dropping that bag," she told herself.

"If it weren't for that young man's honesty, I might have lost it. And suppose I had?"

She trembled at the thought.

In the bag was more than two thousand dollars—a sum withdrawn from her bank not two hours before with which to purchase letters of credit—and the steamer tickets for herself and niece, who were to sail for a summer in Europe the next day.

Suppose she lost those tickets and all that money! The vision of the calamity that would follow caused her to catch her breath.

And she had nearly done it. She had escaped such ill fortune by a hair-breadth.

However, she thought gratefully, her grasp on the bag in her hand tightening, she *had* avoided the catastrophe.

Arrived at the end of the aisle, Miss Hutchison stepped out into the rotunda. And a glance at the clock, hung in the dome, brought an ejaculation of surprise to her lips.

It was noon, and she had arranged to meet Marion, her niece, not later than half after eleven. She was nearly half an hour late, she realized, as she turned hastily up another aisle.

An hour before, Marion and she had parted on the second floor of the store, promising to meet again at the glove counter. Miss Hutchison, arriving there fifteen minutes ahead of time, had whiled away a few tedious moments in the selection of a pair of *souëes*, and departed.

She intended returning promptly. But the minutes had slipped by uncounted in her aimless wandering about the store, and now she was late.

How foolish she had been to leave the counter, in the first place. Marion, arriving to find her gone, might go off in search of her; thus they both would be

lost in vain seeking of each other through the crowded store.

Still, she was only twenty minutes late; her niece would wait for her. Yet, she thought worriedly, she should not have parted from the girl at all.

There was Marion's troublesome love-affair, Miss Hutchison remembered with a catch of her breath.

When the niece had confessed to her love for Tom Somebody-or-other (her aunt did not know who nor what he was), she had put her foot emphatically down upon the match.

"You are too young—entirely too young!" was her one objection—the unalterable answer to her niece's every argument.

She refused to see the girl's lover, turned a deaf ear to all praise of his good qualities, and at last, driven to desperation, was preparing to carry Marion off with her to Europe.

"She's a dear," the girl informed Tom Clinton, who raved vainly over the impossibility of the situation; "and I know she'd agree with me that you're one, too, if she'd only agree to see you. But she won't."

"I'm all she has to love in the world, Tom, and she hates to lose me—yet. In a year or so I'm sure she'll change her mind. But, until then, we'll just have to wait. And, remember, she thinks she's doing the best thing for me. She's really a darling."

The "darling" now turned down the aisle containing the glove department. The passageway between the two counters was comparatively deserted; her swift glance down its length unobstructed. And Marion was not there.

Her worst fears were realized. They had missed each other.

She would ask the salesgirl if any one answering to her niece's description had been there. Miss Hutchison stepped hastily forward.

She was within two yards of the counter and breathlessly hurrying on—when she stopped short with a startled gasp.

Lying beside a pile of boxes on the counter was a plain, black-leather shopping-case—her bag!

With widened eyes she stared at the chatelaine. There could be no doubt about it; it was her own.

Even at that distance she could see plainly a long scratch on its upturned side—a mark she remembered accidentally to have been made some time before with a hat-pin.

She readily understood how the bag came on the counter. She had carelessly left it behind when she went away from the department a half-hour ago.

But—she raised the black-leather case she held in her hands—but if the bag on the counter was hers, to whom did the one she carried belong?

The young man who gave it to her told her that he had picked it up behind her on the floor. She did not have her own bag with her; therefore he had thought the case hers, since she alone, probably, of all the women about him, was empty-handed.

And her mistake in taking the strange chatelaine was no less simple than his error in giving it to her. The case in her hands was the exact duplicate, in point of size and general appearance, of her own—of a thousand others in daily use. Without the scratch upon her bag, she could not have told the difference between the two, even if they were placed side by side before her.

Here she had been carrying around a strange shopping-case under the impression that it was her own—congratulating herself upon the recovery of her bag—and all the time her precious chatelaine, the receptacle of her money and the steamer tickets, *was* lost!

For over half an hour that unpretentious-appearing shopping-case had been lying in plain view on the counter. And in it was over two thousand dollars in bills—to say nothing of the six hundred dollars' worth of tickets as well.

Surely good fortune followed in her footsteps to-day. She had thought herself lucky when the bag she imagined to be her own was returned to her. Now, she was really fortunate in actually recovering her property.

Miss Hutchison stepped quickly to the counter.

"I left my bag here a few minutes ago," she said to the saleswoman. "That is it," reaching out her hand to the case before her.

"I beg your pardon," replied the girl, picking up the bag and laying it down

on the ledge of the shelf behind her. "This belongs to some one else."

"Some one else!" Miss Hutchison exclaimed. "I'm sure you're wrong—the bag belongs to me!"

The girl watched her with a smile upon her lips.

"Do you think you lost your bag, madam?" she asked slowly.

"Certainly I don't *think* it!" the little lady answered a trifle sharply. "I know I lost it. The bag you've just picked up is mine."

The smile deepened on the salesgirl's face. She leaned confidentially over the counter.

"You've made a mistake," she said in an amused tone. "Your bag isn't lost—you're carrying it in your hands right now!"

Miss Hutchison gasped, and, lifting the bag she held, stared from it to the young woman's smiling face.

"You're mistaken," she replied quickly. "This bag isn't mine—I don't know whose it is. But the one behind you belongs to me."

"You're sure you haven't made some mistake?" The girl's voice was kind, as though she was speaking to an unreasonable child. "Surely you wouldn't be carrying somebody else's bag instead of your own?"

Miss Hutchison sat down on the stool before the counter. The situation was aggravating in the extreme. Here she was, within sight of her bag and its precious contents, but she couldn't get it because this stupid girl thought the bag she held in her hands was her own. Oh, it was maddening!

"You wouldn't be carrying two bags, would you?" the young woman was saying.

Collecting her scattered wits, the little lady leaned forward and impressively addressed her.

"Listen," she began. "A young man picked this bag up from the floor behind me on the other side of the store, and gave it to me. I had left my bag—the one behind you—here on this counter, where I bought a pair of gloves not more than half an hour ago.

"Of course, the man thought the chatelaine was mine; I was near it, and did not carry a bag, as probably every other

woman around him did. I took the bag, thinking it was mine, when I discovered that the one I owned was gone—you can see for yourself how much alike the two are.

"That young man and I both made a mistake. You're making one, too, by holding back my property. Now, won't you please return my bag to me?"

The girl looked at her in silence. The smile had left her lips, and she considered the older woman quite gravely.

"Well, you see," she said slowly at length, "it's very peculiar, you know—you having a bag in your hands and then coming to claim this one. I don't want to make any mistake."

"But that's just what you are doing!" Miss Hutchison cried earnestly. "I tell you that bag behind you on the shelf is mine!"

"Well," hesitated the girl, "you see, I don't know. Maggie—she's the girl that waited on you, I guess—she told me that somebody'd left her bag here, and to give it to the party when she called. But she didn't say anything about the person who left it having two bags. And I don't—"

"Where is the other girl—the one who waited on me?"

"Maggie? She's gone home. You see—"

"When will she return?" Miss Hutchison impatiently interrupted again. "She can identify me and give me back my bag."

"She won't be back," calmly announced the other. "She went home sick, and she won't be here till to-morrow morning."

The little lady received the information in stunned silence. This girl would not surrender her bag because she did not know her. The salesgirl who could identify her was not there. How was she to secure her property, then?

"This is most annoying!" she exclaimed at last. "I don't know what I can do to convince you that the bag you are keeping from me is really mine."

The girl pondered the situation for a moment.

"Well, ma'am," she said finally, "you understand I'm willing to give you your bag if I know it's yours. But I don't want to get into any trouble over it. If

I turned it over to you, and somebody came along after you'd gone, and I found you hadn't—well—"

"I can tell you everything that's in it," cried the other, suddenly struck with the idea. "Just hold the bag down under the counter, where I can't see it, and I'll identify everything it contains."

The girl smiled again, this time pityingly.

"No, ma'am," she grinned; "that's too easy. Suppose the bag belonged to somebody you knew, and you'd seen whatever was in it—you could tell me all right. We girls that need our jobs have got to be awful careful or we'll get fired, you see."

Miss Hutchison's teeth closed with an angry snap. The situation was intolerable—and there seemed no way out of it.

Why had that young man ever handed her the hateful bag she carried? If he hadn't troubled to return to her what was not hers, she would not be in her present difficulty.

And why hadn't she been more careful in accepting it? Why hadn't she kept her wits about her and examined the bag before she took it?

Suddenly she sat erect upon the stool. Into her mind had flashed a sudden, horrifying thought.

It had not occurred to her before, but—had that young man really picked up the bag, as he said he did?

Suppose—she shuddered at the possibility—suppose he had lied? Suppose the bag was his and he had wished to be rid of it?

Why should he wish that? Because he did not want to be seen carrying the case.

Perhaps the young man was a shop-lifter!

She had read stories of the desperate means taken to avoid capture by this order of criminals.

This might be one of those stories happening in real life. The young man, if he was a shoplifter with a bag full of loot, might have been pursued through the store.

The first thing he would do would be to try to get rid of the incriminating evidence of his guilt.

And what more natural means of doing

so could he devise than to hand the bag over to the first woman he saw without a shopping-case, explain that he had picked the bag up near her on the floor, trust to luck that she might indeed have dropped hers, and substitute his booty-sack for her property?

Had that happened to her? Miss Hutchison felt a cold perspiration break out on her body.

She remembered the young man's manner when he had given her the bag she held. She recalled that he had hurried off immediately after she took the case from him.

Was he a thief? Had he made her a party to his crime by turning over to her the stolen goods to escape detection?

What was in the bag he had given her? If she had looked into it in the first place, she would have avoided the mistake she had made. And if the case contained stolen property when she received it, that property was still there.

There was just one way to find out. With a swift turn of her wrist, she opened the bag she held on her knees as she sat on the low stool before the counter.

Dropping her eyes, she shot a swift glance within. Then, with a half-smothered cry, she snapped the clasp hastily shut and looked fearfully about her.

The chatelaine was crammed—literally stuffed to bursting with a disordered mass of expensive laces, gold watches, odd bits of jewelry, an embroidered scarf or two—a jumble which fairly shrieked its identity to be "loot."

Oh, where was Marion? the little lady thought agonizedly. She needed her; needed some one near her to bolster her waning courage.

She cast a second nervous glance around her. At the realization that no one had seen the inside of the case, she drew a deep sigh of relief and sharply caught her breath.

Her eyes met those of a familiar face at the corner of the aisle, ten yards distant, on her left.

The same thickly-mustached man in the brown derby hat who had stared at her after she received the strange bag, was now watching her.

His eyes seemed to bore two holes into her head with the intensity of his gaze.

Miss Hutchison felt the color rushing into her cheeks as she turned away her timid glance.

Who was that man? He frightened her. Her eyes dropped again to the shopping-case in her lap. Did he know what was in it? she wondered nervously.

She must get rid of the bag. The danger of its contents being discovered and found in her possession was too great.

Forgotten was her previous distress at her failure to recover her own chatelaine in the new anxiety to be rid of the other.

But how was she to do away with the bag of stolen goods?

The burden of the problem was too much for her to bear unaided. If Marion would only come, she thought worriedly, they two could devise some means out of the difficulty.

"Say," broke in the voice of the saleswoman, watching her troubled face from behind the counter, "I'm awful sorry about that bag; honestly I am! I don't know but what it does belong to you, and—well—oh, gee! I wisht I knew what to do about it!"

Miss Hutchison looked up at the girl, her lip trembling at the sympathy in her voice.

The young woman had a kind face; perhaps she could help her. If she told her what was in the bag she held, possibly the girl could advise her how best to dispose of it.

Suddenly she determined to throw herself upon the shopwoman's mercies. She brought the leather case up from her lap and laid it down on the counter.

Her fingers twisted tremblingly at the clasp, the bag slipped half-open—and a hand gripped her lightly on the shoulder.

The tiny little lady turned with a nervous little cry—to look up into the heavily mustached face of the man in the brown derby.

"Don't open that bag, lady!" the man said in a low, grim voice; "not unless you want to get yourself pinched before the whole store!"

Miss Hutchison stared wildly into his lowered face. His first words confirmed her suspicions as to the consequences of the discovery of the shoplifter's bag in her possession. This man, then, knew what was in it.

"I — I don't understand you!" she said weakly. "Who—who are you?"

"I'm the store-detective — see?" the man explained in a hoarse whisper. "I'm onto what you got in that grip, see? Now, you want to keep quiet and not make no fuss, or you'll have me snap the bracelets onto you right out here in front of everybody. See?"

"B-bracelets!" Miss Hutchison stammered between her chattering teeth. "W-what d-do you m-mean?"

"Handcuffs — darbies — manacles is what I mean—see?" he whispered fiercely. "Now, you want to keep quiet and come along with me without no trouble."

She was arrested! Oh, this was terrible, terrible. If Marion would only come!

"B-but," she stammered, her eyes pleadingly searching the face of the man bending over her—"but you—you are making a mistake! I am not what you think me to be—truly. I can explain—"

"No, you won't!" the other interrupted in a hard undertone. "There's nothin' to explain. You're caught with the goods, and you'll have to come along with me."

"W-where are you going to take me?" the little lady asked helplessly.

"I'll take you to the manager's office; he'd like to see a slick shoplifter like you! We'll search you there."

"Search me!" Miss Hutchison rose tremblingly to her feet. "Oh, you can't—you won't do that! Please—"

She broke off abruptly as her eyes, raised to the man's face, swept down the aisle behind him.

Marion was advancing toward her down the passageway.

At last! Now she would not be alone in her trouble; her niece would help her.

"Marion!" she called to the approaching girl, "Mar—"

Her voice died in her throat; the girl was not alone—with her was a man, a young man—

It was *the* young man who had given her the bag of stolen goods!

She turned swiftly to the fellow with the mustache standing beside her.

"There!" she cried excitedly, pointing to the advancing couple. "There is the person whom you want—there is your shoplifter!"

The man in the brown derby turned swiftly. His jaw hardened as he caught sight of the alert-eyed young man coming up the aisle.

"Why, auntie!" exclaimed Marion. "Whatever is the matter? What has happened?"

"Marion!" Miss Hutchison gasped the question. "What are you doing with that—that man?"

"Oh, it's Tom—Tom Clinton!" the girl answered hastily. "Let me introduce you. Tom, this is—"

"Stop!" the little lady checked her. Then, aquiver with indignation, she stepped forward and faced the young man.

"So you are the man who dares to love my niece!" and she addressed him in a voice which trembled with anger.

"You—a common thief, a—"

"Why, aunt!" Marion broke in amazedly.

"Stop!" her aunt interrupted her. "Marion, you have been deceived in this man. He is a thief—a criminal!"

"There is some mistake here, I'm positive," and the young man addressed the indignant, flashing-eyed lady before him. "You surely do not mean—"

"You surely do not mean to deny that you gave me this bag, do you?" his accuser cried fiercely.

"I gave it to you, yes!" the other answered surprisedly. "But—"

"That will do," Miss Hutchison broke in. "You gave me this bagful of stolen lace and jewelry and other things. You hear that?" and she turned excitedly to the black-mustached man who now stood behind her. "He admits that he gave the bag to me—he is the one you can take before your manager and search! Show him this 'slick' shoplifter!"

"Will you let me explain—" Marion's companion began.

"Explain!" scornfully demanded Miss Hutchison. "Explain—what have you to explain?"

"Marion," as she turned to her niece, standing in wide-eyed astonishment beside her, "this—this man came up to me in this store half an hour ago and gave me this bag. He told me he picked it up from the floor near me—I had left my own bag here on this counter, and so

took this case to be mine—and then he hurried off.

"Inside the bag is a mass of stolen property. This man was probably pursued through the store, wished to get rid of his loot, and so turned it over to me. You see—"

"Wait!" The young man stepped determinedly forward. "You must let me explain. I gave you this bag, just as you said I did, telling you that I had picked it up from the floor behind you. That is true; I found the bag and gave it to you because you were the nearest woman to it without a bag of some sort, and I thought it belonged to you. But I did not know what was in it. I never saw it before I picked it up—it was *not* mine!"

Miss Hutchison stared at him speechlessly. His story was plausible; there was no reason why it could not be true. And he was the man her niece loved. Marion surely would know if he were a criminal.

Perhaps she had made a mistake in accusing him. But—

"But if you are not guilty," she stammered faintly, "who is the shoplifter to whom this bag belongs?"

The man in the brown derby cleared his throat and stepped out from behind the little lady.

"Now, don't make a fuss about this right out in the open," he cautioned the three. "You don't want to rouse the whole store, do you?"

They looked at him in silence.

"I'm the house-detective," the man explained to the girl and her fiancé. "We can arrange this thing, if you'll keep quiet, so there won't be any scandal in which the old lady"—nodding at Miss Hutchison—"is mixed up. Just keep cool now, and I'll fix this thing."

"But who is the thief to whom this bag belongs?" the little lady asked worriedly. "Until he is found, I shall be under suspicion because I have the stolen goods."

"I don't know who he is," replied Marion's friend, "but I'm going to see if I can't find him."

He turned away. As he passed Marion, he whispered in her ear:

"This is my chance. Your aunt is in trouble; and if I can get her out of it,

I'm certain her objection to our engagement will end. I've got a clue that I'll follow up in the next five minutes and report on right away. Wait for me."

He walked hurriedly down the aisle. The man in the brown derby looked after him sharply; and then, stepping to the counter beside them, beckoned Miss Hutchison and her niece to draw near.

"Now," he said in a confidential undertone, "here's what I'll do. You turn over that bag to me; I'll report the goods in it to the office, and let you get away."

"Of course, I could pinch you and make a lot of trouble that you wouldn't like to have happen. But I'll keep my eyes shut, so to speak, this time, and let you go."

He turned to Marion and winked knowingly toward her aunt.

"I can see the old lady ain't a professional crook. I understand what's the matter with her." He wagged his head shrewdly. "Kleptomaniacs can't help their habits—she ain't to blame."

"But!" Miss Hutchison gasped amazedly; "you—"

"Say," the shopgirl behind the counter interrupted, "I've changed my mind about givin' you that bag of yours."

She cast a scornful glance at the mustached man.

"I don't believe you're a shoplifter, nor a 'klep,' neither," she announced.

With a determined gesture, she handed the little lady her precious satchel. "There you are, madam," she said, glowering again at the man beside them. "Those fly cops think they know it all," she sniffed contemptuously; "but they don't."

The little lady hurriedly opened the bag, and the eyes of the brown-derbied man at her side glistened as he caught sight of the roll of bills within.

"Now, let's get down to business," he whispered hastily. "You give me that bag and—a hundred dollars out of that roll, and I'll let you go."

Miss Hutchison looked uncertainly at her niece. Should she do as the man asked—pay a bribe to save herself from the consequences of a crime she had not committed? The two women stared helplessly at each other.

"Quick!" hissed the low voice at their side. "Turn over that bag and the

money, and I'll beat it. If you don't, I'll take you both to the manager's office, have you searched—both of you, mind—and then take you to jail. Which is it?"

The little lady glanced questioningly again at Marion.

"Do as he says, aunt," whispered her niece. "You must save yourself from this dreadful predicament."

Miss Hutchison looked timidly at the man bending over her shoulder.

"You understand," she said slowly, "that I am innocent of any wrong-doing—"

"I only understand that I'm taking graft and runnin' the danger of gettin' fired out of my job," he answered quickly. "Come on, now; hand over that bag and a hundred dollars!"

The little lady detached a bill from the bundle in her bag and slipped it, with the shoplifter's chatelaine, into his hands. Almost before they realized it, so swift was his departure, the man was gone.

"Well," the little lady sighed wearily, "that's over with now. I've got rid of that hateful case of stolen property, and I have my own bag again. I suppose I'm very fortunate to get out of all this annoyance as easily as I have."

"That horrid man!" Marion exclaimed angrily. "To think that he would accuse you of being a—thief! I hope he does lose his wretched job for treating you as he did—and then making you pay him for it!"

Miss Hutchison rose.

"I'm lucky, I guess, to escape anything worse," she said. "Come, dear, we'll go now."

"Oh, wait!" the girl cried in some embarrassment. "Tom—Mr. Clinton promised to be back and asked me to wait for him."

"Marion," began her aunt sharply, "we will not stay—"

"Look—auntie!" her niece interrupted, staring behind the little lady.

Miss Hutchison turned quickly.

Coming toward them down the aisle was a group of men led by Tom Clinton, in whose footsteps followed the fellow in the brown derby, his arms linked in those of two strangers.

"Here's your shoplifter, Miss Hutchi-

son," Mr. Clinton announced as the party halted at her side. "This man who told us he was the house-detective here is the thief himself.

"I suspected that all wasn't well," he continued. "The way the man kept cautioning us to be quiet struck me as a little odd. It seemed that he was more anxious than we were to avoid notoriety.

"So I went at once to the manager of the store, asked him for a description of the detective, and was immediately introduced to this gentleman"—he bowed to one of the two men between whom the thief stood—"as none other than the genuine special officer.

"I explained the situation to the manager," he nodded to the second of the two men holding the shoplifter—"and we three started to the scene at once.

"On the way we met this crook just getting ready to leave the store, collared him, and he has confessed." He turned to the black-mustached man.

"Tell your story to the ladies as you told it to us," he ordered.

"Why, there ain't nothin' to tell, I guess, they don't already know," the man answered with a wry smile. "Somebody knocked the bag out of my hand and I saw this young feller pick it up and give it to the old lady. Then I followed her, tryin' to get it back, some way.

"I seen her open it up here at this counter, so I went up and pretended to be a detective that was goin' to arrest her—threw a scare into her so's she'd give up the bag.

"Then I seen the wad of bills she had, and I thought I could carry the game further and get some cash out of her on the bluff. If I hadn't done that," he ended ruefully, "I'd have got away. Hanging around to get that money was what gave these men a chance to get me before I got off."

Miss Hutchison looked from the thief to the young man standing at her niece's side. He came forward and returned to her the money she had given the pseudo-detective.

"Thank you," she said.

"He wasn't such a bad sort of a fellow, after all," she thought, as she carefully surveyed him. "He was quite clever, too, to foil that man's game. Perhaps—"

Marion, watching the softened expression upon her aunt's face, advanced to Tom Clinton and linked her arm in his.

"Don't you think, auntie—" she began shyly.

Miss Hutchison instantly burned her bridges.

"I think," she said firmly, "that we'd better go to lunch—all three of us!"

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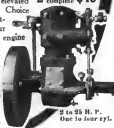
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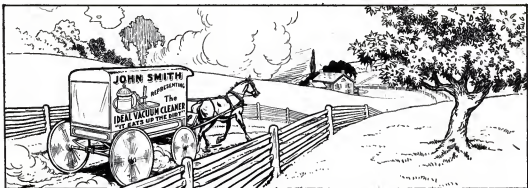
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REGALFORM

Regal Shoes are now made on the new REGALFORM Last

And as a result of this Regal invention and patent, which is owned exclusively by us, they are the *only* ready-to-wear shoes in which you can obtain perfect custom fit. The **REGALFORM** Last is made in *two sections*, which are withdrawn, *one after the other*, from the finished Regal Shoe—first part A, then part B. This permits Regal Shoes to be shaped in perfect proportion at the instep or “waist,” duplicating the snugness found heretofore only in the highest-priced custom shoes.



REGAL
Sign of
y^e REGAL

REGAL

All other ready-to-wear shoes are built on old-style, solid wooden lasts, and must therefore be made large at the “waist,” to allow the broadest part of the last to be withdrawn. This explains their tendency to wrinkle over the instep and under the arch, and to let the foot slide forward and crowd against the toe of the shoe. Remember that only in Regal Shoes can you get the small, snug, custom instep, made possible by the **REGALFORM** Last—

The Latest Regal Triumph



200,000 PENNIES INTO SLOT MACHINES EACH DAY

As the result of some recent legal proceedings it was brought out that 200,000 pennies each day are dropped into the slot machines of the Subway and Elevated Railway Stations in New York City.

YOU CAN REAP A HARVEST OF PENNIES IN YOUR SPARE TIME

By investing a small amount of money in **STANDARD PEANUT VENDING MACHINES** from 50% to 80% profit can be made without interfering with your present occupation. **OPERATORS EVERYWHERE ARE MAKING AMAZING PROFITS.** One man in a leading University is paying his way through college on the profits from fourteen of these machines. Another operator is making from \$50 to \$75 a week from 100 machines. Write us for other instances of success with these machines.

THE STANDARD PEANUT VENDING MACHINES are the most perfect vending machines on the market. They cannot get out of order and will not rust out.

If you are interested at all, drop us a postal, and we will convince you that there is big money to be made operating our machines, and that we can quote you the lowest prices.

STANDARD MANUFACTURING CO.,

410-412 West 10th Street, INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

Smart Regal Styles for Spring

The 252 Regal models for Spring are duplicates of the new Spring styles produced by the most famous and highest priced London and New York custom bootmakers. In every line and curve these Regal Spring models possess distinctive custom smartness.

The new Regal Oxfords are built on special Oxford lasts. They do not chafe the heel or gape at the ankle, but fit smoothly and evenly at every point.

SHOES

FOR MEN
&
WOMEN

REGAL
Sign of
the REGAL

Regal Quarter-Sizes

The advantages of Regal *quarter-sizes* are now everywhere recognized.

They afford *double* the usual number of fittings and insure an *exact* fit for every foot.

Regal Shoes are sold directly from the Regal factories to *you*, with all intermediate profits eliminated.

\$4.00 and \$5.00

Also the greatest **\$3.50** shoe values in the world.

SPRING AND SUMMER STYLE BOOK—Illustrates the correct models for both men and women. It's an acknowledged authority on styles. Magazine size. Handsome cover in colors. Free on request.

If you don't live near one of the 624 Regal Stores and agencies, order from the Regal Mail Order Department. If the shoes are not exactly as ordered, we will cheerfully exchange them, or refund your money, if desired.

REGAL SHOE COMPANY

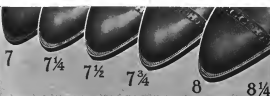
Mail Order Dept., 599 SUMMER STREET, BOSTON, MASS.
Mail Order Sub-Stations: Factory, Whitman, Mass., Box 195. San Francisco, Cal.,
Phelan Building. London, Eng., 91 Chapside, cor. Lawrence Lane, E. C.

Olmstead, \$3.50

Delivered Prepaid, \$3.75
Style O 1258—(A 1/4 size)
treated; Oxford, Blucher-
cut. Made of Black
King Calf.
Style O 8658—
Same, except
made of
Russet
King
Calf.
Price \$4



**1/4
Sizes**



CRYSTAL Domino SUGAR

5 lb Sealed Boxes Only! • Best Sugar for Tea and Coffee! • By Grocers Everywhere!

You can tell it



by this Label

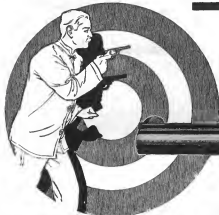
"Porosknit" SUMMER UNDERWEAR

"I'm so glad I insisted on the label. I learned that last summer. This summer I looked for the "Porosknit" label first and I know I got the coolest thing for warmest weather—fit and wearing quality too." Ask your dealer for it.

MEN'S Shirts and Drawers, each **50c.** Union Suits \$1.00
BOYS' Shirts and Drawers, each **25c.** Union Suits 50c

Styles and sizes? In the new booklet. Send for it now.

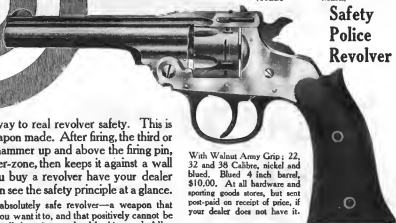
CHALMERS KNITTING COMPANY
37 Washington Street, Amst. and N. Y.



You are insured against accident and positively protected with the HOPKINS & ALLEN Triple Action

(Trade Mark)

Safety
Police
Revolver



Triple Action is the only way to real revolver safety. This is the only Triple Action weapon made. After firing, the third or triple movement lifts the hammer up and above the firing pin, altogether out of the danger-zone, then keeps it against a wall of solid steel. Before you buy a revolver have your dealer show you this one. You can see the safety principle at a glance.

If you're looking for an absolutely safe revolver—a weapon that shoots straight and hard when you want it to, and that positively cannot be discharged unless you actually pull the trigger—the Hopkins and Allen Triple Action Safety Police, is the revolver that you need.

THE HOPKINS & ALLEN ARMS CO., 10 Chestnut St., Norwich, Conn.

With Walnut Army Grip: 22, 32 and 38 Calibre, nickel and blued. Blued 4 inch barrel, \$10.00. At all hardware and sporting goods stores, but sent post-paid on receipt of price, if your dealer does not have it.

Our latest Gun Guide and Catalog sent free on request. Shows our entire line of revolvers, rifles and shotguns. Write for it NOW.

\$10 Blued Finish

The Prudential

made the

Greatest Gain in

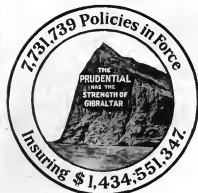
Insurance in Force in 1908

of Any Life Insurance Company in the World!

Giant Strides of a Giant Company:

Gain in Life Insurance in Force, in 1908, over 97 Million Dollars
Paid Policyholders, during 1908, over - 19 Million Dollars
Dividend Fund to Credit of Participating
Policies, Dec. 31, 1908, nearly - 15 Million Dollars

**Total Payments to Policyholders Since Organization,
Plus Amount Held at Interest to Their Credit, Over
313 Million Dollars!**



Write for
Rates of New
Policies. Address Dept. 98

Other 1908 Features:

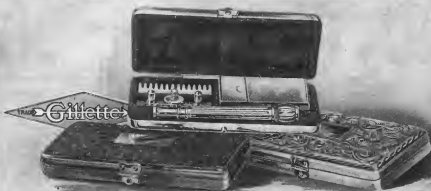
Expenses Reduced.
New Monthly Income Policy Inaugurated.
Loaned to Policyholders, on Security of
their Policies, to Dec. 31, 1908, over
10 Million Dollars.
Tax Payments in 1908, nearly 1¼ Million
Dollars.

The Prudential

Insurance Co. of America.

Incorporated as a Stock Company by the State of New Jersey.

JOHN F. DRYDEN, President. Home Office, Newark, N. J.



Gillette Safety Razor

New Pocket Edition

HERE is news indeed—for the two million men who shave themselves every morning with the Gillette Safety Razor.

Our first announcement of the latest GILLETTE achievement—the *New Pocket Edition*—the GILLETTE Safety Razor in such compact form that it can be carried like a card case in the waistcoat pocket, or slipped into the side of a traveling bag.

Same size blade as before, same principle; but neater, more workmanlike, the most perfect shaving implement in the world—as compact and as beautifully finished as a piece of jewelry—and the blades are fine.

New York, Times Bldg.
Chicago, Stock Exchange Bldg.
London Office,
27 Holborn Viaduct, E. C.

GILLETTE SALES CO.

554 Kimball Building, Boston

Factories: Boston, Montreal, London, Berlin, Paris

If you are a GILLETTE user call on some progressive dealer at once and examine this new razor.

If you have never used the GILLETTE now is the time to get acquainted.

You can shave yourself in from two to five minutes with the GILLETTE—a clean, satisfying shave. *No stropping, no honing.*

The pocket-case is of gold, silver or gun metal. Plain polished or richly engraved in floral and Empire designs. Inside the pocket-case are *handle and blade box*—triple silver-plated or 14K. gold plated. Prices, \$5 to \$7.50, on sale everywhere.

You should know GILLETTE Shaving Brush—a new brush of GILLETTE quality—bristles gripped in hard rubber; and GILLETTE Shaving Stick—a shaving soap worthy of the GILLETTE Safety Razor.

Canadian Office
63 St. Alexander St.
Montreal

Gillette Safety Razor

NO STROPPING NO HONING